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**MISSIONARY POLITICS IN
CONTEMPORARY EUROPE: JEAN MARIE
LE PEN'S NATIONAL FRONT AND
UMBERTO BOSSI'S NORTHERN LEAGUE**

**Submitted by José Pedro Zúquete
for the degree of PhD
of the University of Bath
Department of European Studies and Modern
Languages
October 2004**

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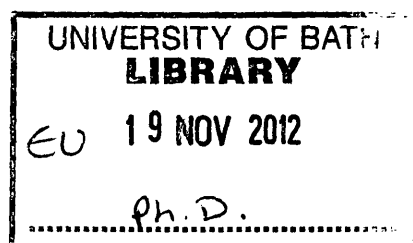
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ABSTRACT

Despite its supposed secularization, in the last decades Europe has witnessed the flourishing of neo-populist movements - commonly regarded as 'extreme right wing movements' - which are characterized by charismatic leaders who proclaim their world-rejecting Salvationist creed to a devoted following. Previous explanations of these movements have been primarily materialistic. While valuable, such explanations do not address the internal beliefs, practices and world-views that motivate these groups. This thesis uses extensive archival material, interviews, publications, speeches, and other empirical data from within two of the most successful such groups, the National Front of Jean-Marie Le Pen and the Northern League of Umberto Bossi, to develop a more productive and inclusive model of charismatic political movements in the contemporary West. The thesis pays special attention to the non-material dimensions of these movements, focusing on the cultural frames that sustain the groups, sacralize them and provide them with a world-view and place in history. These findings are systematized and integrated into an ideal type, designated as "Missionary Politics." This missionary form of politics should be understood, following the methodological path of Emilio Gentile and Roger Griffin, as a cluster concept, defined as a political religion, and characterized by a dynamic interaction between charismatic leadership, a narrative of salvation, outsiderhood and ritualization, and the creation of a moral community invested with a collective mission of battling conspiratorial enemies and of redeeming the nation from its current crisis. The thesis argues that the notion of Missionary Politics sheds light on non-material dynamics in contemporary radical populist movements that have previously been unnoticed or ignored by contemporary social analysis. Furthermore, current trends toward increased globalization, European integration, and Islamic immigration have the potential to increase the allure and potency of charismatic European faith-based movements proclaiming a politics of salvation.



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Missionary Politics-Introduction

1. The Secularization Paradigm

Sociologists and historians have dedicated a body of literature, particularly since the 1950s and 1960s, to the decline of religion both at a societal and an individual level. Although it is not a homogeneous group of writings and explanations, this literature has been clustered into the general term of “secularization theory.” The central argument is that, since the beginning of reformation in the sixteenth century through the enlightenment, the western world has suffered a process of multifaceted modernization that has led to the undermining of religion in the social system and in the minds and behavior of individuals.

Max Weber’s philosophy of history can be considered the prime reference in all social analysis of the dynamics and effects of secularization. In a speech given in 1918, the German sociologist argued that the increased trend of rationalization and intellectualization led to a “disenchanted world.” That is, “it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation.”¹ In Weber’s view, a crucial development for the construction of an increasingly disenchanted world was the protestant reformation and the rise of a new work ethic that encouraged individualism and led to the emergence of modern capitalism.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber made a distinction between “outer-worldly ascetism” that promoted distance between the spiritual and the rest of society and the new “inner-worldly ascetism” that saw hard work, activism, and

¹ Max Weber, “Science as a vocation”, speech given at Munich University, 1918, in H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1958 (paperback edition), p.139.

diligence as a way of gaining God's favor.² This boost to individualism would, in the long term, undermine deep-rooted ideas about hierarchy and even the social relevance of religion for the organization and life of communities. A major feature of modernity's march towards a "rational" construction of society was the prominence of an organized group of experts, a bureaucracy in charge of human affairs. Weber described the emergence of an era where authority was based on rational grounds. "The bureaucratic structure", Weber wrote in *Economy and Society*, "is everywhere a late product of development. The further back we trace our steps, the more typical is the absence of bureaucracy and officialdom in the structure of domination. Bureaucracy has a 'rational' character: rules, means, ends, and matter-of-factness dominate its bearing."³

On the whole, the theoretical spine of Weber's analysis has remained central to the current secularization paradigm. Modernization is viewed as the greatest enemy of religion. One of the main contemporary defenders of the secularization paradigm, sociologist Steve Bruce, describes secularization as a "social condition manifest in (a) the declining importance of religion for the operation of non-religious roles and institutions such as those of the state and the economy; (b) a decline in the social standing of religious roles and institutions; and (c) a decline in the extent to which people engage in religious practices, display beliefs of a religious kind, and conduct other aspects of their lives in a manner informed by such beliefs."⁴ This is, in sum, the view of the disenchanted world described by Weber. In Bruce's words,

the clash of ideas between science and religion is less significant than the more subtle impact of naturalistic ways of thinking about the world. Science and technology have not made us atheists. Rather, the fundamental assumptions that underlie them, which we can summarily describe as "rationality" ... make us less likely than our forebears to entertain the notion of the divine.⁵

This secularizing trend, however, as generally admitted by proponents of the secularization paradigm, tends to be geographically delimited to the western world. Sociologist Peter L. Berger, one of the fathers of the paradigm turned critic, observes the emergence of powerful movements of counter-secularization in the contemporary world.

² Max Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Scribner, Ny, 1958 (Originally published in 1904-05).

³ Weber, Max "Economy and Society", in H.H Gerth and C.W. Mills, *op.cit*, p.244.

⁴ Bruce, Steve "God is Dead: Secularization in the West", Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Mass, 2002, p. 3.

He particularly emphasizes Islamism and evangelicalism as “the two most dynamic religious upsurges in the world today.”⁶ These movements are orthodox in the sense that they are characterized by an intense religious fervor and a return to traditional sources of religious authority. Similarly, Philip Jenkins argues in *The Next Christendom* that the center of gravity of the Christian world has shifted from Europe and the United States to the Southern Hemisphere. “Christians”, Jenkins writes, “are facing a shrinking population in the liberal west and a growing majority of the traditional Rest. During the past half-century the critical centers of the Christian world have moved decisively to Africa, to Latin America, and to Asia. The balance will never shift back.”⁷

A school of thought particularly critical of the secularization paradigm that has gained prevalence in the last decades has been the application of “rational-choice theory” applied to religious studies. It is essentially a supply-side theory of religion and has as a major contributor, among others, sociologist Rodney Stark. While accepting a macro-version of secularization, in terms of institutional differentiation between the church and the state, the supply-side school rejects the notion that there has been a micro-version of secularization in the last centuries, that is, a general decline in religious commitment, in individual piety and belief. The demand for religion has always remained constant since people always want the salvation and relief from fear that religion has to offer. Therefore the fact that the levels of subjective religiousness remain high even in the nations most often cited as examples of secularization undermine the secularization doctrine.⁸

From this perspective, religion is seen as a product in the marketplace and, from the various options available, people choose according to their hopes, fears and needs. The implication is that people act rationally in choosing their religion. Therefore, an environment of religious freedom (pluralism), with open competition between religions, enhances religious vitality and the level of consumption (in terms of a more active not

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 28-29.

⁶ Berger, Peter L. (Ed), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Eedermans, William B., Publishing Company, 1999. pp. 6-7.

⁷ Philip Jenkins, “The Next Christianity”, in *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 2002, p.; see also, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford University Press, 2003 (paperback).

⁸ On this issue see, Rodney Stark, “Secularization R.I.P.” in Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2000, pp.57-79.

lazy laity). Religion is consequently subject to the laws of supply and demand. This factor explains the religious disparities within the western world. That is why the United States is a more religious country than European countries (where religious monopoly has a stronger tradition that undermines the “religious market”).⁹

Even if it has been challenged, the secularization theory is still a dominant one and shared by many scholars. In a recent work Inglehart and Norris have established a direct link between the process of societal modernization and the declining importance of religious values in postindustrial nations. One of their conclusions is worth quoting in its entirety:

We conclude that due to rising levels of human security, the *publics of virtually all advanced societies have been moving towards more secular orientations*. We demonstrate that “modernization” (the process of industrialization, urbanization, and rising levels of education and wealth) greatly weakens the influence of religious institutions in affluent societies, bringing lower rates of attendance at religious services, and making religion subjectively less important in people’s lives.¹⁰

“In Europe”, observes sociologist of religion Philip Jenkins, “Christianity is largely a dead issue.”¹¹ In fact, at both a popular and a scholarly level, the current assumption is that religion is on the decline in Europe, particularly Western Europe. The secularization paradigm seems to hold in European territory. In fact, if attention is paid to the religious upsurge in other parts of the world, in matters of faith Europe increasingly looks like an exceptional case.¹² This can be seen at two levels: at an institutional level church attendance is at an all-time low, the majority of churchgoers are overwhelmingly elderly and the church, either Protestant and Catholic, has increasing difficulty in recruiting members for the clergy; at an individual level, very few people follow church-

⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 220-233

¹⁰ Inglehart, Ronald and Pippa Norris, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p.18.

¹¹ Philip Jenkins, “Christianity’s New Center”, in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Interviews, September 2002, p.

¹² Inglehart and Norris stress the fact that the notion of “secular exception” of Europe should be extended to all of the postindustrial societies. To her, “secularization is not taking place only in Western Europe, as some critics have claimed (though it was first observed there). It is occurring in most advanced industrial societies including Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Canada ... But even in America there has been a lesser but perceptible trend toward secularization; the trend has been partly masked by massive immigration of people with relatively traditional worldviews.” In Inglehart, Ronald and Pippa Norris, *op.cit*, p.18

dictated codes of behavior and an increasing number plays down the importance of religion in their personal lives.¹³

In this environment it comes as no surprise that the member states of the European Union decided to exclude any reference to God in the newly-approved European Constitution. There is no reference to the Christian roots of Europe either. Instead there is a somewhat vague reference in the preamble of the document to “the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe.”¹⁴ It is a symbolic but very significant episode of a continuous narrative of secularization.

2. Mission in Max Weber's Sociology

In his analysis, Weber describes how the Western World was indeed marching towards an inexorable rationalization. However, Weber leaves open the possibility of discontinuities in this process. Weber's introduction of the concept of *charisma* in social science should be seen as way of counterbalancing this rationalist trend with the occasional irruption of the irrational and enchanted in the modern world. In politics, this means the possibility of heroic leadership. The emphasis on heroic leadership was not new in itself, after all, thinkers such as Thomas Carlyle before him had put forward “great man” theories of leadership and historical change. “For, as I take it, Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world,” declared Carlyle in 1840, “is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here.”¹⁵

Weber's innovation is his emphasis both placed on the concept of charisma and charismatic domination. This is a major contribution to subsequent leadership literature. Charismatic authority is the opposite of the legal or bureaucratic authority. Indeed, it rests

¹³ “The European Values Study: A Third Wave”, Tilburg University, 1999/2000.

¹⁴ “Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe – Preamble”, in <http://european-convention.eu>. The EU leaders reached agreement on the new Constitutional Treaty for Europe at the European Council in Brussels on June 17 and 18 2004. The Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe will be signed on October 29, 2004 in Rome. It then has to be ratified by all Member States either by parliamentary approval and/or referendum.

¹⁵ Carlyle, Thomas, “On Heroes and Hero Worship,” Everyman's Library, Dutton, New York, 1962, p.239. (first published in 1841 and based on a series of lectures he delivered in 1840.)

“on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him.”¹⁶ The concept of charisma is a religious term meaning “the gift of grace.” In the New Testament the apostle Paul describes a *charism* as a divine bestowal of power incapable of being induced by human effort and manifestating itself in spiritual gifts (*charismata*) such as prophecy, healing, and glossolalia.¹⁷ Using the work of religious scholar Rudolph Sohm as a basis, Weber took the concept from its original Christian context and tried to make it operational in the historical and social domain. Therefore, there should be no surprise at the persistence of religious undertones in Weber’s work on charisma. Charismatic leaders resemble the biblical prophets. “The term ‘charisma,’” he wrote in his landmark study *Economy and Society*,

will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a “leader.”¹⁸

In the beginning, there is a “revelation” that proves to people that the leader should be followed. “It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma. This recognition is freely given and guaranteed by what is held to be a proof, originally always a miracle, and consists in devotion to the corresponding revelation, hero worship, or absolute trust in the leader.”¹⁹

A central tenet of Weber’s theory on charismatic authority is the concept of “mission.” It is another term that Weber took from Christian vocabulary. In Trinitarian theology it means the sending into the world of the Son or Spirit by the Father, or of the Spirit by the Son, especially for the purpose of salvation.²⁰ Understandably, the apostles of the New Testament used terminology that intimately linked with a sense of mission or vocation in life. “Pure charisma,” Weber writes, “is specifically foreign to economic considerations. Wherever it appears, it constitutes a ‘call’ in the most emphatic sense of

¹⁶ Weber, Max “Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology”, vol.1, pp.215-216.

¹⁷ Acts 2:2

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.241.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.242

the word, a 'mission' or a 'spiritual duty'."²¹ Weber makes it clear that the charismatic leader is driven by a sense of mission, of "calling" or "vocation." In *Politics as a Vocation*, he declares,

Here we are interested above all in the second of these types: domination by virtue of the devotion of those who obey the purely personal "charisma" of the "leader." For this is the root of the idea of a *calling* in its highest expression. Devotion to the charisma of the prophet, or the leader in war, or to the great demagogue in the *ecclesia* or in parliament, means that the leader is personally recognized as the innerly "called" leader of men. Men do not obey him by virtue of tradition or statute, but because they believe in him. If he is more than a narrow and vain upstart of the moment, the leader lives for his cause and strives for his work.²²

In Weber's work, the role in history of these leaders with a sense of mission is crucial. Although he describes the coming of a world run by bureaucrats, Weber longs for a world run by true charismatic leaders driven by a cause. This is particularly important for democracies, in which "there is only the choice between leadership democracy with a 'machine' and leaderless democracy, namely, the rule of professional politicians without a calling, without the inner charismatic qualities that make a leader." In a paragraph very revealing of his mindset Weber observes,

all historical experience confirms the truth – that man would not have attained the possible unless time and again he had reached out for the impossible. But to do that a man must be a leader, and not only a leader but a hero as well ... Only he has the calling for politics who is sure that he shall not crumble when the world from his point of view is too stupid or too base for what he wants to offer. Only he who in the face of all this can say 'in spite of all' has the calling for politics.²³

Recognition of the charismatic leader and complete personal devotion to the possessor of the charismatic quality arise out of either "enthusiasm" or of "despair and hope."²⁴ The charismatic leader sense of mission comes into being during a period of crisis. The effect of a crisis is dual: crisis disrupts the social and psychological equilibrium and increases the need for a strong leader; crisis also leads to the

²⁰ quote

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.244

²² Weber, Max, "Politics as a vocation", in H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills, *op.cit.*, p.79.

²³ *Ibid.* p. 128.

²⁴ Weber, Max "Economy and Society", *op.cit.*, p.242.

development of the sense of mission by the future leader. It reinforces his inner drive to act and lead. It strengthens his own devotion and faith in his mission. In Weber's words,

The mere fact of recognizing the personal mission of a charismatic master establishes his power. Whether it is more active or passive, this recognition derives from the surrender of the faithful to the extraordinary and unheard-of, to what is alien to all regulation and tradition and therefore is viewed as divine – surrender which arises from distress or enthusiasm.²⁵

3. Mission in Secular Religions

That the life and mission of religious leaders are at the center of Weber's analysis of charismatic leadership is understandable. After all, the type of devotion and inner calling described by Weber can easily be found, for example, in the examples taken from the Bible or medieval history, in times where the religious sphere was admittedly more central to the life of individuals, groups, and communities. However, Weber was particularly pessimistic about the march of rationalization and bureaucracy and its implications for men. The potential danger was spiritual emptiness and a government of bureaucrats and technocrats removed from the people.

Thus Weber stressed the importance of the political sphere in the modern world as a last resort of freedom and creativity in history. As in the past a charismatic religious leader could affect the evolution of history, so in modernity a charismatic political leader could do the same. Charisma is in Weber's view a "specifically revolutionary force," a locus of creativity and freedom. In his words, "[charisma] may then result in a radical alteration of the central attitudes and directions of action with a completely new orientation of all attitudes toward the different problems of the 'world'"²⁶ It is not surprising that Weber rejected what he saw as a "leaderless democracy," typically

²⁵ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, op.cit, vol.2 p.1115

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.245.

parliamentary democracy, and opted instead for a “plebiscitarian democracy,” a case of “democracy with a leader.”²⁷

The sense of mission of the charismatic political leader described by Weber, unlike that of the charismatic religious leader, is not divine: It is not based on a divine revelation and the leader does not pledge to do any God’s work, or say any God’s words. There is, however, a vagueness in Weber’s description of charismatic political movements. There was no actual detailed description of the political leader’s mission. In Weber’s somewhat vague analysis, the religious undertones of the political charismatic leader remain powerful. The Leader is somehow perceived as superhuman. There is an intense emotional attachment between the leader and the followers. The followers blindly follow their leader and his mission. The charismatic relationship has more to do with emotion than with reason.

It is clear that here is a quasi-religious dimension to the relationship between leader and follower even if the final goal is not religious in the narrow sense of bringing people closer to God or an afterlife. A movement may be religious in a broader sense, even though Weber never specifically developed his analysis of what has come to be known in the domain of social sciences as “secular religions.” Such secular religions are intimately linked with the exaltation and deification of the concept of nation typical of modernity, particularly since the American and French revolutions of the eighteenth century. The connection between the sacred and the nation can be seen in the “Social Contract,” written in 1762, by French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In a section titled “On Civil Religion,” Rousseau defended the necessity for any new nation-state of creating its own civic religion in order to strengthen the links of the citizens to the national community. The “dogmas of civil religion” were a necessary and positive thing. In the words of Rousseau,

The dogmas of the civil religion ought to be simple, few in number, precisely worded, without explanations or commentaries. The existence of a powerful, intelligent, beneficent divinity that foresees and provides; the life to come; the happiness of the just; the punishment of the wicked; the sanctity of the social contract and of the laws. These are the positive dogmas. As for the negative dogmas, I limit them to just one, namely intolerance.²⁸

²⁷ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in H.H. Gerth and C.W.Mills, *op.cit*, and p.113.

²⁸ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *On the Social Contract*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1987, p.102.

French traveler and historian Alexis de Tocqueville also made some insightful observations about the links between religious faith and political action in his 1856 book *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*. Commenting on the French Revolution, he noted that it followed the lines of a religious revolution. To Tocqueville,

No previous political upheaval, however violent, had aroused such passionate enthusiasm, for the ideal the French Revolution set before it was not merely a change in the French social system but nothing short of a regeneration of the whole human race. It created an atmosphere of missionary fervor and, indeed, assumed all the aspects of a religious revival – much to the consternation of contemporary observers.²⁹

Weber also touched upon the subject of secular religions in a manuscript that, however, he never finished. In it he wrote: “In its first and most energetic manifestations the idea of nation has involved, in a way or another, even if in a concealed way, the legend of a ‘providential’ mission, which accomplishment would be taken upon by those to whom it was directed the *pathos* of being its representatives.”³⁰

However, it would be up to a contemporary of Weber’s, French sociologist Emile Durkheim, to develop further the process of the transfer of the worship of the deity to the worship of the nation. At the very basis of Durkheim’s sociology is his functional and experiential definition of religion. To him,

We arrive thus at the following definition: A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices, which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.³¹

Durkheim sees all religious systems as being based on the distinction between the profane, or the ordinary world, and the sacred, the religious world. What separates these two realms is a collective system of beliefs, myths, rites, and symbols. In Durkheim’s explanation,

²⁹ Tocqueville, Alexis De., *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, Doubleday Anchor Books, New York, 1955, pp.12-13. (first published in 1856)

³⁰ Weber, Max in Cavalli, Luciano, *Il Capo Carismatico: Per una Sociologia Weberiana della leadership*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1981, p.265.

The division of the world into two domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane – such is the distinctive trait of religious thought. Beliefs, myths, dogmas and legends are either representations or systems of representations that express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers attributed to them, their history, and their relationships with one another as well as with profane things.³²

Although Durkheim never mentions the words “secular religion,” he does consider the nation to be the contemporary form of the religious, with its sacred objects, emblems, and rituals establishing the moral community of the sacralized state. The flag, he said, is the totem of today.

After the American and French revolutions, a major boost to the concept of secular religions came from the rise of ideologies such as Fascism, Nazism, and Communism which had a strong component of faith, a communal dimension, and an ultimate goal of salvation not outside the world but within the world. Eric Voegelin was the first theorist specifically to name these movements “political Religions.” In a tract published in 1938 and confiscated by the Nazis the German philosopher denounced their anti-Christian nature, saying that “temporal religiosity, be it mankind, the *volk*, the class, the race, or the state, which is expressed as the *Realissimum*, is a falling away from God.” He added,

belief in man as the source of good and of betterment of the world, such as that which dominated the Enlightenment, and the belief in the collective as a mysterious, divine entity, as has been propagated since the 19th century, is anti-Christian, to use the language of the Mystic of Frankfurt; it is turning away.³³

In a seminal study, Italian historian Emilio Gentile has outlined the development of “sacralization of politics” since the outbreak of modern nationalisms in America and Europe. For Gentile, this phenomenon emerged “when the political dimension, after gaining institutional autonomy from traditional religion, acquired its own religious dimension, in the sense that takes on a sacred character, [and] claims for itself the mission of defining the meaning and ultimate goal of human existence... for the

³¹ Durkheim, Emile, *The Elementary forms of Religious Life*, The Free Press, New York, 1995, p.44 (Originally published in 1912).

³² *Ibid*, p.34.

³³ Voegelin, Eric, *Political Religions*, New York, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986, p.79 (Originally published in 1938)

individual and collectivity.”³⁴ Gentile distinguishes between two categories: *Civil religion* relates to the sacralization of a common civic creed and the development of a system of beliefs, symbols and rituals aimed at celebrating the collectivity. Robert Bellah, for example, has studied the quasi-religious dimension of American nationalist sentiment. Bellah, in his famous essay “Civil Religion in America” has described how the American civil religion “has its own prophets and its own martyrs, its own sacred events and sacred places, its own solemn rituals and symbols.”³⁵ Adopting a clear Durkheimian approach Bellah showed how this religious dimension of American democracy spawns solidarity and encourages the citizens to make sacrifices for the goals of the national community. Gentile contends that civil religions are typical of democratic regimes in order to create attachment and consensus. *Political religion*, on the other hand, is identified with the sacralization of politics by antidemocratic ideologies and regimes. For Gentile,

Political religion is the sacralization of a political system founded on the irrevocable monopoly of power, on ideological monism, and on compulsory and unconditional subordination of the individual and collectivity to its [political religion] codes of commandments: as a consequence the political religion is intolerant, imposing, integral and wants to permeate every aspect of individual and collective life.³⁶

Therefore, while civil religion is a form of sacralization of politics that serves to increase the legitimacy and allegiance to a given political system, political religion is a form of sacralized politics that is inherently “total” in the sense that drives the political movement, provides a worldview and gives meaning and sense to reality. It is on this form of sacralization of the political – political religion – that my thesis is focused.

One scholar who has elucidated the concept of political religions has been French sociologist Jean-Pierre Sironneau, who has studied what he sees as the “undeniable” transfer of sacredness from the religious sphere to the political sphere in some political ideologies and movements in the last two centuries. To Sironneau,

³⁴ Gentile, Emilio, *Le Religioni della Politica: Fra democrazie e totalitarismi*, Editori Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2001, pp. XI, XII.

³⁵ Bellah, Robert, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Winter 1967, Vol.96, No.1.

³⁶ Gentile, Emilio, *op.cit.*, pp.XIII, XIV.

“Political religions” are thus, among the metamorphoses of the sacred in a secular world, those where the traditional manifestations of religion (myth, rite, communion, faith) are easier to detect; they are the ones that best take over the legitimating of social order religion used to perform. That is the reason why we have deemed it necessary after their explosion in the first part of the twentieth century, to study both their nature and their function.³⁷

Nazism and Communism serve Sironneau as two major examples of political religions. Both ideologies share what Sironneau sees as the “four usual dimensions of religious phenomena”: a mythical core, ritual, communion, and faith. However, even though these secular religions play the functional role of religion, Sironneau is careful to point out that they are not religions in the phenomenological sense, in terms of “essence,” that is, of a belief in superhuman beings and solving the problem of life after death. To him, “the transcendence aimed at by the ‘political religions’ is a pseudo-transcendence because the hereafter, in the future, remains prisoner of the temporality of history.”³⁸

On the whole, when social science has focused on the concept of political religions it has done so either by taking as case studies movements such as Fascism, Nazism, and communism or by applying the concept to post-colonial states. Regarding the latter, the literature on post-colonial modernization, particularly in the 1960s, emphasized the role played by political religions in cementing the solidarity and collective commitment to the newborn nation states. David E. Apter, a proponent of this theory, described the process in these terms:

After independence the situation changes radically. Not individualism but mass participation through community action becomes the condition of national success. The ends of the state become elevated to virtually a sacred level ... the reasons for the rise of political religions among the new nations are not hard to find. Faith is a source of authority. The new nations face the problem involved in the creation of overarching loyalties that transcend the more primordial ones of ethnic membership, religious affiliation, linguistic identification.³⁹

Regarding totalitarian regimes, particularly from the inter war period, German historian Karl Dietrich Bracher has described the “new philosophies” that took hold on the turn of the twentieth century as political religions, or “pseudo-religious ideologies with the dual

³⁷ Sironneau, Jean-Pierre, *Sécularisation et religions politiques*, Paris, Mouton Éditeur, 1982, p.577.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.558.

claim to scientific validity and, simultaneously, to religious absoluteness.” Bracher writes that these movements,

promised to reunite what modern science and secularization had divided: harmony once more between culture and technology, between politics and culture. They attempted to promise everything to everybody, to be an all-embracing movement and an all-embracing faith ... The reverse of the medal was the emphatically one-sided militant and activist character of the totalitarian movements employing these substitute religions. Fascism and national-socialism, just as Leninism-Stalinism and later Maoism, were both things at the same time: promise of an eventual community – the 1000-year Reich or universal communism – but meanwhile, and above all, mobilization ideologies for battle with the total enemy.⁴⁰

Similarly, historians Gentile and, more recently, Roger Griffin, have emphasized the heuristic value of the concept of political religion to understand Fascism. According to Griffin,

[Fascism] manifests itself, at least in inter-war Europe and in some other Europeanized societies, as a *political religion*, driven by the *utopia* of regenerated national community saturated with *mythic* and *palingenetic thinking*, reminiscent of early modern forms of European *millenarianism* without being a direct perpetuation of them, but bent instead on purging society of alleged sources of socio-cultural and/or racial decadence within historical time.⁴¹

Historian Michael Burleigh, in his book *The Third Reich: A New History*, also approached Nazism as a form of political religion, that is, as part of political movements “as pseudo- or substitute religions, with eclectic liturgies, ersatz theologies, vices and virtues.” “The Great war and its disturbed aftermath,” noted Burleigh, “led to an intensified revival of this pseudo-religious strain in politics, which exerted its maximum appeal in times of extreme crisis, just as medieval millenarianism ... had thrived in times of sudden change and social dislocation.”⁴²

³⁹ Apter, David E., “Political religions in the new nations,” in Clifford Geertz, *Old Societies and New States*, The Free Press of Glencoe, New York, 1963, pp. 66-80

⁴⁰ Bracher, Karl Dietrich, *The Age of Ideologies: A History of Political Thought in the Twentieth Century*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1984, pp.32, 33. (First published 1982)

⁴¹ Griffin, Roger “Cloister or Cluster? The implications of Emilio Gentile’s Ecumenical Theory of Political Religion for the Study of Extremism,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol.6, No.1, Spring 2004, p.14.

⁴² Burleigh, Michael, *The Third Reich: a New History*, Hill and Wang, New York, 2000, pp.6, 7.

• The Decline of Political Religions?

The concept of “Political Religion” has therefore been closely linked with totalitarianism, and has been associated with the establishment of political regimes – for example Fascism, Nazism, and communism - that have indeed developed some form of political religion. As political scientist Juan Linz has written “Political religions are powerful and have shaped the life of people in the 20th century in unique ways,” he notes “but only because they could rely on the power resources of a totalitarian state including its coercive resources.” He adds “they do not seem to have generated sufficient strength of belief to survive the loss of power.”⁴³ As I will show, the persistent scholarly focus on the totalitarian and coercive nature of these political religions has obscured less extreme manifestations of sacred politics in the contemporary context. However, even the application of the political religion rubric to extreme totalitarian movements has meet resistance from a considerable number of scholars. They say the notion of political religion confuses the differences between the “essences” of these movements and traditional religions, and overstates the role of emotion to the detriment of more rationalist appeals. Historian Ian Kershaw has dismissed the political religion approach as “a currently vogueish revamping of an age-old notion, though no less convincing for being repeated so persistently.”⁴⁴

Even among those who see the political religion approach in a more favorable manner, there seems to be a tacit consensus that political religions are, on the whole, on the wane in the contemporary world. It is as if the process of secularization of society had also led progressively to a total de-sacralization of the political realm. For example, Weberian sociologist Luciano Cavalli writes that Weber’s forecasts about Western rationalization and secularization have proven wrong for inter-war Europe due to the advancement of secular religions. Cavalli notes that “In recent years secularization has

⁴³ Linz, Juan, “The religious use of politics and/or the political use of religion: Ersatz ideology versus ersatz religion,” Conference paper, Munich, September 1994, p.5.

⁴⁴ Kershaw, Ian, “Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.39 (2),2004, p.250.

attacked secular religions too. Today Weber's forecasts [about secularization] make more sense than they did for decades after his death."⁴⁵ He adds, "Secularization considerably weakens traditional religions at first, and then the secular ones such as Marxism-Leninism."⁴⁶

Although recognizing the role of religion as a "constitutive aspect of human experience," Sociologist Daniel Bell stresses in a similar manner the undermining of the sacred set off by rationalization "[O]n the double level of social structure and culture, the world has been secularized and profaned." Bell states that "religion is no longer the 'collective conscience' of society ... because society is radically disjointed, its different realms of the techno-economic sphere, with its principle of functional rationality, the polity and its surge for equality, and the culture with its demands for self-fulfillment creating increasingly intolerable strains."⁴⁷ According to him, "the 'ground impulses' behind aestheticism and political religions are exhausted."⁴⁸

The same position is taken by historian Philippe Burrin. In his evaluation of the relevance of the concept of political religion, he expresses doubts about the possibility to "re-enchant a society in the clutches of modernity." Instead, political religions will likely be swept away by the march of rationalization. Discussing the inherent frailty of political religions he writes,

The type of political, moral and spiritual unity that they aim to create can only be thwarted by the massive movement toward rationalization of society, by the institutional segmentation and the technical specialization that continuously engender the splitting of social life into autonomous spheres. Even on their own privileged level of beliefs, symbols and rituals, the limits of political religions are soon evident.⁴⁹

Sironneau, a critic of the secularization paradigm who sees political religions as one of the resurgences of the sacred, feels compelled to note "the state of implosion and

⁴⁵ Cavalli, Luciano "Charisma and Twentieth-Century Politics," in M.S. Whimster and S.Lash, *Max Weber, rationality and modernity*, Allen&Unwin, London, 1987, p.324.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.332.

⁴⁷ Bell, Daniel, "The Return of the Sacred? The Argument on the Future of Religion," *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol.28, No.4 (Dec.1977), p.442.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.439.

⁴⁹ Burrin, Philippe, "Political Religion: The Relevance of a Concept," *History and Memory*, Vol.9, No.2, 1997, p.342.

desegregation of the modern metamorphosis of the sacred.” Referring to what he sees as the *echec* (failure) of political religions he writes,

Political religions, moreover, if they have affinities with numerous aspects of traditional religions, they are not however, properly speaking, religions, and because of that they de-mythicize rapidly: the myths of progress and historicism, in which they generally supported themselves are today devaluated.⁵⁰

Gentile also sees political religions in decline at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Although he acknowledges the fact that sacralization of politics can eventually be “a dormant vulcan,” Gentile writes that,

One might consider the sacralization of politics an imposing but extraordinary and contingent phenomenon, closely connected to the tumultuous cultural, political, economic and social changes that have dominated the process of modernity in the last two centuries: a phenomenon, hence, either already exhausted or on its way to exhaustion, with the end of the epoch with generated it.⁵¹

Even Stanley G. Paine, who recognizes the “vitality of the sacred in ever-multiplying metamorphoses,” does not specifically identify it in any contemporary European political movement apart from a passing mention of Basque and Catalan nationalism and the ideology of “Political Correctness.” For him, “diverse forms [of political religion] may be found in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in African and Asian countries.”⁵²

It seems therefore that, according to major scholars, at least regarding European liberal democracies, political religions seem to be losing ground so rapidly that they are doomed eventually to disappear altogether. It is as if movements led by a charismatic leader invested with a mission of salvation and characterized by myth, ritual, communion, and faith, represent mere traces of a past doomed to be overtaken by the natural course of history. In fact, the internal dynamics of liberal democracies seem, on appearance, to be a natural corollary of a world more and more “disenchanted.” They do seem to fit perfectly the secularization paradigm that opened this introduction. As argued

⁵⁰ Sironneau, Jean-Pierre, *op.cit.*, p.562.

⁵¹ Gentile, Emilio, *op.cit.*, p.202.

⁵² Payne, Stanley G. “Emilio Gentile’s Historical Analysis and Taxonomy of Political Religions,” in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol.3, No.1 (Summer 2002), p.125.

by Steve Bruce, “what most marks the political cultures of the modern industrial societies of the West from those of other countries is that the former are largely secular.” “Liberal democracies”, he continues, “are distinguished by having formally secular polities, their religious institutions are largely impotent except to the extent that they accept secular rules of engagement, and the majority of the population either have no religion or adhere to religions that have mutated a long way from their orthodox bases.”⁵³ This is the taken-for-granted consensus that I intend to context in the following pages. But before doing so, let me return to the concept of charisma, as recent theorists have understood it.

• The Decline of Charismatic Leadership?

As Ronald E. Riggio stated in an article in the recent *Encyclopedia of Leadership*, “currently, there is no generally accepted agreed-on definition of charisma.”⁵⁴ However, if social scientists have found difficult to define charisma, major post-Weberian works on charismatic leadership have had a more defined focus on examples of charismatic leaders. The rule in choosing 20th century case studies has been to take them either from the more extreme examples of the interwar period or from underdeveloped societies, particularly in relation to colonial struggles or post-colonial contexts.⁵⁵ The literature of charisma studies has not paid the same attention to more stable, more modern and, therefore, allegedly less “enchanted” environments, such as those of contemporary Western liberal democracies. As in the case of research on political religions, this general scenario assumes the ebb of the sacralization of the political; therefore it is not surprising that major scholars have demonstrated, for some time, uneasiness regarding the phenomenon of charismatic leadership in their analysis of contemporary Western

⁵³ Bruce, Steve *Politics and Religion*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2003, pp. 245-246

⁵⁴ Riggio, Ronald E, “Charisma” in Goethals, George R., G.J.Sorenson and James MacGregor Burns, (eds), *Encyclopedia of Leadership*, Vol.1, Sage Publications, Inc, Thousand Oaks, California, 2004, p.158.

⁵⁵ A good example of this tendency in post-Weberian charismatic leadership studies can be found in Willner, Ann Ruth, *The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership*, New Have, Yale University Press, 1984. On this topic see also, Cavalli, Luciano, “Carisma” in *Enciclopedia delle scienze sociali*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma, 1996, particularly pages 679-683.

political dynamics and situations. The following words of Jasper B. Shannon, written in 1949, testify of the mindset, not to say the hope, shared by many scholars. To him,

Perhaps a more realistic, not to say more scientific, age will look upon our belief in leaders who can solve our social ills by political magic as absurd as we regard the divine power attributed to monarchs in the healing of bodily ills... Confused and baffled, we follow the human practice of the ages, we make men into gods and worship or curse them as fortune, fate, or the weather make us alternately comfortable or unhappy. In any case the size and complexity of human problems have become so great that only the inordinately ambitious or the well nigh saintly unselfish will assume the task of political leadership. Institutions need to be constructed for the industrial age which will reduce mass dependence upon charismatic leadership.⁵⁶

It is not surprising that a number of social scientists have argued that the academia should get rid of the term charisma in analysis of contemporary political dynamics and situations. Writing in 1960, American historian Arthur Schlesinger_Jr. wrote, “the grounds of the democratic leader’s authority rest characteristically on his capacity to gain *conditional* support from enough interests and people to put together a *temporary* majority; his method is characteristically a pragmatic balancing of forces, appeals, and policies: none of this finds room in Weber’s system.” Schlesinger accused Weber’s analysis of having a “hypnotic effect” on leadership literature and noticed “the uselessness of charisma as a concept with which to analyze leadership in more complicated cases than those of medicine men, warrior chieftains, and religious prophets.”⁵⁷

A similar skepticism regarding the use of the term charisma to describe modern politics can be found in the work of sociologist Karl Loewenstein. Arguing against the validity of the category of charismatic authority in times of technological mass democracy, Loewenstein observed, “In the last analysis, as a basis of rule, it [charisma] possesses a historical reality. Or, to put it differently: charismatic authority in politics is a

⁵⁶ Shannon, Jasper B. “The Study of political leadership,” in Jasper B. Shannon (ed), *The Study of Comparative Government: An Appraisal of Contemporary Trends*, Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc, New York, 1949, pp.327-8.

⁵⁷ Schlesinger Jr., Arthur, “On Heroic Leadership: and the Dilemma of strong Men and Weak Peoples”, in *Encounter*, Vol.XV, No. 6., December 1960, pp.6-7

phenomenon of the pre-Cartesian world.”⁵⁸ Therefore, charisma belongs to the enchanted world that, at least in the Western setting, humanity had left behind.

Luciano Cavalli has also written about the flimsy chances of the survival of charisma in contemporary democracies. In his words,

Because in the secularized democracies of our times, the metaphorical pointer that establishes the disposition of the masses towards a leader points obviously more towards “trust” than “faith.” Moreover, in a democracy charisma reveals the weakness that Weber had referred to. Not supported by the monopoly of the media and collective symbols, exposed in reality to the timidity or aggressiveness of multiple points of view, to criticism and disdain, attacked in its last foundation, [the] ideal, by the triumphant hedonist materialism, the charisma of the savior, of the public benefactor, will maintain itself with difficulty.⁵⁹

James MacGregor Burns, a major scholar of leadership studies, considers charisma to be a nuisance concept: “leaders who fill bellies” Burn writes, “can be tested on the basis of how many bellies filled.” Charisma as a sociological concept addresses merely “an array of murky psychological needs,” and, therefore, cannot be studied in a serious and rational manner; thus, any form of leadership that satisfies ‘hungers’ of the ‘mind and spirit’⁶⁰ should be approached primarily as “an exotic or lopsided form,” of Burns own concept of “transforming leadership”, that is, leadership that “accomplishes rational, planned transformational change – real, comprehensive, durable change, changes that advance the great public values.”⁶¹ His is a telling example of contemporary scholarly discomfort – often the mark of a dismissive attitude towards the subject – in dealing with the “non-rational,” charismatic dimensions of politics.

⁵⁸ Loewenstein, Karl, *Max Weber's Political Ideas in the Perspective of Our Time*, (translated by Richard and Clara Winston), The University of Massachusetts Press, 1966, p.86.

⁵⁹ Cavalli, Luciano *Carisma: La calidad extraordinaria del líder*, Editorial Losada, Buenos Aires, 1998, pp.106, 107. (First published in 1995)

⁶⁰ Burns, James MacGregor, *Transforming leadership: A New Pursuit of Happiness*, New York, Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003, p.27.

4. The Problem

Until lately, like the concept of political religion, charisma had been largely banned from the academic analysis of contemporary political life. But recent developments have challenged the dominant rationalist model in social analysis. In the last decades the world has seen the rise in liberal-democratic countries of leaders so driven by a sense of mission and so deft at creating a devoted following that they are invariably defined as “charismatic.” Powerful examples of these “new charismatics” come from a pool of new populist movements that are usually described as fitting into the “extreme right” of the political spectrum. Major works have confirmed this new charismatic strain in such movements operating within liberal-democracies. Herbert Kitschelt calls it the “New Radical Right” and observes that it shares in common with the Fascist parties of the past “the prevalence of charismatic leadership.”⁶² In the same vein, Hans-Georg Betz argues, “the most successful radical right-wing populist parties are led by charismatic figures capable of setting the political and programmatic direction.”⁶³ Mény and Surel observe that this increasing trend of populism “advocates the power of the people, yet relies on seduction by a charismatic leader.”⁶⁴ Gianpietro Mazzoleni observes that “neo-populist movements characteristically organize themselves around charismatic and strongly personalized leaderships and are immediately and exclusively identified with highly visible and controversial leaders.”⁶⁵ Among the characteristics displayed by the successful parties of the extreme right, notes Piero Ignazi, there is “an appealing, charismatic, and uncontested leadership which could prevent and control internal factionalism and attract the attention of the media.”⁶⁶ Eatwell brings a similar point home in writing that some voters “are strongly attracted by extreme right and populist policies

⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp.22, 27

⁶² Kitschelt, Herbert *The Radical Right in Western Europe: a Comparative Analysis*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1995, p.32

⁶³ Betz, Hans-Georg, and Stefan Immerfall, *The New Politics of the Right: Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1998, p.9

⁶⁴ Mény, Yves and Y. Surel (Eds), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, London, 2002, p.17

⁶⁵ Mazzoleni, Gianpietro., J. Stewart and B. Horsfield (Eds) *The Media and Neo-Populism: A Contemporary Comparative Analysis*, Praeger Publishers, Westport, 2003, pp.4, 5.

⁶⁶ Ignazi, Piero *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p.203

on issues such as immigration and law and order, and by 'charismatic' personalities such as Le Pen."⁶⁷ Eatwell sees the personification of issues and policies in the uncontested figure of the leader as a major "rational" tool particularly in election times. However, he does recognize the persistence of an emotional and affective relationship with the leader within these movements.⁶⁸

Meanwhile, resurgent literature on charismatic leadership has followed Weber, and emphasized the intimate link between the development of a sense of mission and a situation of crisis. In Weber's analysis, as mentioned above, recognition of the charismatic leader arises out of "enthusiasm, or of despair and hope."⁶⁹ Norberto Bobbio has expressed his conviction that

Any discussion of the phenomena of charismatic leadership, as in the past with [the phenomenon of] Caesarism, makes evident the fact that either one of them arise in times of historical crisis, in the passage of a power system to another, in the moment in which the violent break of a system opens the road to the foundation, also violent, of a new system, [accomplished] either by a civil war or a revolution.⁷⁰

Robert C. Tucker notes both that "charismatic leadership is specifically Salvationist or messianic in nature" and that "the followers respond to the charismatic leader with passionate loyalty because the salvation, or promise of it, that he appears to embody represents the fulfillment of urgently felt needs."⁷¹ In the words of Pierre Bourdieu, "prophetic discourse is thus more likely to gain success in periods in which economic or morphological transformations determine the collapse, decline, or obsolescence of traditions or value-systems that provided the principles of a world-view and a mode of life."⁷² Charles Lindholm, observes that a charismatic relation "is a creative and regenerating force likely to be favored particularly in times of social malaise and

⁶⁷ Eatwell, Roger and Cas Mudde, *Western Democracies and the New Extreme Right Challenge*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, p.1

⁶⁸ On this point see, Eatwell, Roger, "The Rebirth of Right-Wing Charisma? The Cases of Jean-Marie Le Pen and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol.3, No.3 (Winter 2002) pp.17-21.

⁶⁹ Weber, Max *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, op.cit, p.242

⁷⁰ Bobbio, Norberto "Attenti al carisma, la violenza viene dal 'capo'," in *Reset*, No.48, May 1998, p.5.

⁷¹ Tucker, Robert C. "The Theory of Charismatic Leadership," In Rustow, D. (ed), *Philosophers and Kings: Studies in Leadership*, George Braziller, New York, 1970, p. 81.

⁷² Bourdieu, Pierre "Legitimation and structured interests in Weber's sociology of religion", in S. Whimster and S. Lash (Eds), *Max Weber, Rationality and modernity*, Allen&Unwin Publishers, 1987, p.130.

suffering, when fragmented social formations are especially in need of reinvigoration through charismatic participation.”⁷³ Even authors such as Ann Ruth Wilner, who does not see a situation of crisis as a requirement for the rise of charismatic political leadership, admit that “preconditions of exogenous social crisis and psychic distress are conducive to the emergence of charismatic political leadership.”⁷⁴

This points to two major problems in the social science analysis of contemporary trends in democratic societies. If the western world, particularly Europe, is more and more secular and rational, then why does charisma (in its missionary form), which ultimately has to do with fervor and emotion, remain an instrument in European politics? Shouldn't this “less enchanted” environment prevent the revival of charismatic leadership, as observed by several commentators? Complicating analysis is the fact that European western democracies do not seem, on the surface, to be living through any of the dramatic crises –such as wars or disasters - that are traditionally seen as catalysts of the emergence of a discourse of charismatic mission. How then can one explain this persistence of a charismatic strain in Western European politics?

A distinction must be made from the outset. The last decades have witnessed a popularization of the term *charisma*. It has become commonplace: Everyone who is popular, appealing, or gifted in sports, arts, or politics becomes in the eyes of public opinion, a charismatic figure. The consolidation of a celebrity-oriented culture -fuelled by both the media and the public's insatiable appetite for stardom - is at the very basis of the explosion of charisma in popular vocabulary.⁷⁵ Writing about the overuse of the term fascism, Griffin notes that “in the case of words this means that they are used to embrace more and more phenomena and so progressively lose their discriminating power: the “blanket term” or “conceptual hold-all” is born”.⁷⁶ Indeed, the word *charisma* has been subjected to a similar process of “inflation” and, subsequently, “devaluation.”

In order to avoid this risk of hollowing out the descriptive power of the term, I introduce a distinction between two forms of charisma in contemporary societies. The

⁷³ Lindholm, Charles *Charisma*, Basil Blackwell, Cambridge, Mass, 1990, p.35.

⁷⁴ Wilner, Ann Ruth, *The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1984, p.52

⁷⁵ On the development of celebrity culture in contemporary western societies, see Gabler, Neal, *Life: The Movie, How Entertainment Conquered Reality*, Vintage Books, New York, 1998.

⁷⁶ Griffin, Roger, *The Nature of Fascism*, Routledge, London, 1991, p.1

first one I call the *popular* form of charisma. It is intimately linked with the celebrity-oriented culture and the predominance of the visual and imagery in the contemporary Western world. It is in essence superficial. (I use the word superficial to indicate not something trivial or insignificant but rather something that is near the surface.) It deals essentially with projection of looks and attitudes, of physical and personal qualities deemed appealing and amplified by the media, particularly the visual media. The second form of charisma, which I define as *missionary* is the form that operates within my conceptual framework of missionary politics and on which I focus my thesis.

5. The Missionary Paradigm – Approach and Methodology

As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, the march of rationalization has pushed to the forefront a continuous narrative of secularization that has itself ultimately led to the undermining of traditional religions and, in a later period, to the failure of political religions in Europe. In this way, according to the dominant rationalist paradigm, the sacralization of the political fell victim to a supposedly more “rational,” secular liberal-democratic environment. In this paradigm, the tendency has been to study the sacralization of politics either as a manifestation of the past or, primarily, as the work of exploitive and manipulative propaganda by demagogic leaders and organizations. In my work I approach the phenomenon of sacralized politics not through the lens of the conventional rationalist model but by emphasizing a different dimension of politics in the West, “missionary politics,” which will guide my investigation of the reality of contemporary political movements.

• An Ideal Type

My methodological approach is heuristic and it follows the path of Weber's comparative-historical sociology particularly at the level of construction of ideal types as guiding tools to understand and systematize reality. Weber's causal sociology is anchored in ideal types that provide a framework and a "mental picture" to analyze the world of experience. These heuristic devices function as "yardsticks" that, according to Weberian sociologist Stephen Kalberg, document "patterned action" and assist the researcher in comprehending an "amorphous and ceaselessly flowing reality."⁷⁷ Deeply rooted in empirical reality, these ideal types "seek to isolate, on a rigorous basis, significant causal patterns of action." Because they follow primarily systematic and internally consistent lines they constitute a "conscious exaggeration of *essential* features of the significant action-orientations for the research task at hand."⁷⁸ Aiming at assisting empirical inquiry, ideal types "accentuate those aspects of the empirical case of particular interest to the researcher."⁷⁹ Missionary politics should therefore be understood as a construction, an ideal type that gives a synthesis of the features of the sacralization of the political in a contemporary age.

Two other scholars have attempted to capture the missionary field in contemporary liberal-democratic politics through the use of a methodology that refers back to Weber and the use of ideal-types as heuristic tools. British philosopher Michael Oakeshott put forward two ideal types that, according to him, have been predominant in the modern politics of Western Europe. These two historic styles of politics have been "the politics of skepticism" and "the politics of faith." While the politics of skepticism offers a piecemeal approach to politics, the politics of faith is geared towards a holistic vision of politics within which "[T]he activity of governing is understood to be in the service of the perfection of mankind." Oakeshott adds, "Perfection, or salvation, is

⁷⁷ Kalberg, Stephen, *Max Weber's Comparative-Historical Sociology*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994, p.93.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.86.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.85

something to be achieved in this world: man is redeemable in history.”⁸⁰ In the politics of skepticism, “governing is understood as a specific activity, and in particular it is understood to be detached from the pursuit of human perfection.”⁸¹ For the skeptic the activity of governing is a judicial activity, “not a matter of establishing the ‘truth,’” in which “discussion and ‘opposition’ will not be regarded as means for ‘the discovery of truth,’ but as a means for calling attention to something that might otherwise have been forgotten and for keeping government within its proper bounds.”⁸² The opposite is the case for the politics of faith, which aims at a totalizing vision that will transform the world and rid it of pollution. Oakeshott describes these two political styles as abstractions, extremes between which politics have been fluctuating since early-modern European history up to the present. In this way Oakeshott detaches the “missionary model” of analysis from a specific moment or movement in history and introduced the possibility of its application in contemporary liberal-democratic societies.

Drawing from Oakeshott’s analysis, Margaret Canovan argues that there is another face of democracy that is less rational and more emotional, with a strong component of “faith.” It deals with “redemption” rather than “pragmatism.”⁸³ “Inherent in modern democracy, in tension with its pragmatic face,” she writes, “is faith in secular redemption: the promise of a better world through action by the sovereign people.”⁸⁴ Through the use of concepts that systematize a diffuse empirical reality, Oakeshott and Canovan have stressed that the sacred has entered into the political realm, albeit in a “secularized” disguise. Neither, however, has attempted to apply these ideal types to specific case studies, which is the purpose of positing them in the first place.

⁸⁰ Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the politics of Skepticism*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1996, p.23

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.31

⁸² *Ibid*, p.37

⁸³ Margaret Canovan, “Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy,” *Political Studies*, Volume XLVII, No.1, March 1999.

• A Cluster Concept

Building on these contributions, I base my approach to the study of contemporary neo-populist movements through the development of an empirically derived cluster concept of Missionary Politics. Historians Gentile and Griffin, among others, have blazed this methodological trail of clustering. By establishing the parameters of an ideal type, the cluster concept captures reality in a holistic or “organic” manner by emphasizing both patterns of action and dynamic, interconnected constellations of different but related phenomena. Therefore, a cluster should be understood as a central concept or “star” which lies in the middle of a constellation of adjacent and overlapping concepts and associated dimensions. According to this method, as stated by Griffin, conceptual terms “are to be approached ‘synergically’ as complimentary components forming an open-ended nexus of heuristic devices with which to arrive at a deeper understanding of particular aspects of reality.”⁸⁵

Taken as a whole, my research focus on a network of interacting concepts clustering around the central concept of “Missionary Politics” aims at giving a multi-perspective approach to a multi-faceted phenomenon. Grounded in empirical reality and deduced from the material collected within the movements – not imposed from above according to a pre-existing model, which precludes formulating an abstract comparative analysis – my research on Missionary Politics has indicated the following constellation: Missionary Politics should be understood as a form of *political religion* carried out by a *chosen people* who, in a time of self-perceived deep-rooted *crisis*, sees itself as a *moral community* led by a *missionary charismatic* leader undertaking a *collective mission* of *salvation*. Driven by *apocalyptic* and *millenarian* dynamics, the community manifests its solidarity and belief in the mission by constant *ritualization*. In the process, the members of the community celebrate themselves as a *sacred collective*, as representatives of a

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.9

⁸⁵ Griffin, Roger “Cloister or Cluster? The implications of Emilio Gentile’s Ecumenical Theory of Political Religion for the Study of Extremism,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol.6, No.1, Spring 2005 (forthcoming), p.6.

sacred nation and heirs to a *sacred history* involved in an apocalyptic showdown with the evil and *conspiratorial* forces of a *new world order*.

• Cultural Analysis

My adoption of clustering as a methodological procedure to investigate the dynamics of Missionary Politics makes my thesis decidedly multi-disciplinary, and I hope to give a rounded analysis of the phenomenon, open to contributions and insights drawn from an array of different disciplines such as political science, history, cultural anthropology, and sociology of religion. From the major competing theoretical schools in comparative politics - divided between rational choice theorists, structuralists and culturalists - my approach falls within the culturalist research school in the sense that I want to give a cultural contribution to political analysis and show how the experiential, rhetorical, and ethnographic dimensions of religion shape contemporary political groups. *Culture* from this perspective, and following the path of Max Weber and anthropologist Clifford Geertz,⁸⁶ should be understood, not merely as the possession of specific values or beliefs but, in the words of Marc Howard Ross, as a “worldview”, a “system of meaning and identity” that “accounts for why and how people in any particular setting act as they do.”⁸⁷

Due to predominant rationalist assumptions, these groups have until now been primarily explained in terms of their relationship with “issues and “grievances.” The implication is that these groups have been chiefly anchored in materialist frames. But in my study, I attempt to discern how such a group is sustained by non-material dimensions: the cultural frames that sustain these groups, that is, the internal production of a narrative and codes that establish a symbolic world and a framework of salvation. Cultural theorist

⁸⁶ It is useful to remember here Geertz’s classical definition of culture as “an historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life” in Geertz, C, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, Basic Books, New York, 1973, p.89.

⁸⁷ Marc Howard Ross, “Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis,” in Lichbach, Mark Irving and A.S.Zuckerman, *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture and Structure*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

Philip Smith has argued for the need to stress cultural structures such as “binary cultural codes” that oppose good and evil, and “narratives” that mythologize reality by aligning it within a salvation framework, in order to have a broader picture of contemporary charismatic leaders.⁸⁸ I follow Smith’s line of interpretation: hence my primary focus on the discursive frames created by those who are within the movement and involved in a quest for salvation, focusing on what they actually say and do, and how they experience and symbolize the collective, with a special relevance given to the status and role of the leader.

My argument that these cultural frames play a predominant role in the maintenance and development of these groups does not imply a dismissal of more instrumentalist approaches. The appeal of contemporary neo-populist movements certainly is spurred by different dimensions of which “the religious” is only one (albeit, in my view, an important and often neglected one). There are important materialist explanations for the phenomenon - economic insecurity, views on immigration, issues of crime and order, political corruption - that facilitate the identification of some sectors of the population with movements that specifically exploit those insecurities.⁸⁹ But these will not be the focus of my thesis. I agree with Gentile’s contention that “to study a political movement as a secular religion does not mean to find only in this aspect the explanation for [the movement’s] nature and historical meaning.”⁹⁰ However, instrumentalist models that emphasize primarily grievances and concepts such as “political opportunity” often fail to capture the positive identity and extraordinary member commitment engendered by many of these movements, the persistence of culturally specific grand narratives in them, and the role that non-material forces play in the development of these movements’ respective identities.

⁸⁸ Smith, Philip, “Culture and Charisma: Outline of a Theory,” *Acta Sociologica*, Vol. 43, No.2, 2000, p.103-4.

⁸⁹ For a rounded view of a more instrumentalist approach of these movements see, for example, Mény, Yves and Y. Surel (Eds), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, London, 2002.

6. Case Studies

As I have written above, sacralization of politics is a generally absent theme in research on major contemporary movements led by leaders who are repeatedly characterized as “charismatic” by both social commentators and scholars. It is this lack that I propose to remedy in my thesis. Although my research includes other political movements and leaders (whom I intend to investigate further at a later date) for reasons of space, I focus here on two of the most successful: the French *Front National* led by Jean-Marie Le Pen and the Italian *Lega Nord* led by Umberto Bossi. Only a handful of studies have followed a similar approach to mine and have specifically focused on the role of religious frameworks for the implementation and sustenance of these movements – when done, it has often been in a fragmentary manner.⁹¹

From my research I concluded that these two cases are sufficient to discern a pattern or cluster of attributes that can then be extended to provide the skeleton of an ideal type. Looking at both the empirical reality of these movements and the sacred dimension of their respective politics, I will document patterned actions and both integrate and systematize my findings into an ideal type of Missionary Politics. My hope is that I may provide a guideline against which different neo-populist movements can be “measured and compared.” Therefore, adding ethnographic, rhetorical, and symbolic cultural material to the empirical research of neo-populist movements can shed light on dynamics that would otherwise be left unnoticed or unexplained. Further, because my intention is to construct a comparative model and mode of analysis based on the

⁹⁰ Gentile, Emilio., *op.cit.* p.216.

⁹¹ In the case of Le Pen and his movement a notable exception to the dominant rationalist and structuralist trends can be found in a recent book by Lecoœur, Erwan, *Un néo-populisme à la française*, Éditions La Découverte, Paris, 2003 (especially chapters 9 and 10). See also, Souchard, Maryse, S. Wahnich, I. Cuminal and V. Wathier, *Le Pen Les Mots : analyse d'un discours d'extrême droite*, Editions Le Monde, Paris, 1998 (especially pp.132-140 and 216-222) and Lafont, Valerie “Les Jeunes Militants du Front National: Trois Modèles d’Engagement et de Cheminement,” *Revue Française de Science Politique*, Vol.51, No.1-2, February-April 2001 (especially pp.193-97); Regarding the movement of Umberto Bossi some fragmentary references can be found in the works of Biorcio, Roberto, *La Padania Promessa: La storia, le idee la logica d'azione della Lega Nord*, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 1997 (especially chapter 9); Donegà, Claudio, “Strategie del Presente. I volti della Lega,” in Giovanni de Luna (ed) *Figli di un benessere minore: La Lega 1979-1993*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1994; Berzano, Luigi, *Religiosità del*

relationship between religion and politics, I work to deduce general principles from my case studies more than is usual in political science. The necessary loss of the nuances and elaboration of differences between each of the movements under study will be compensated for by the extensive ethnographic narratives and the patterns discerned in them. I hope that my primary focus on the religious dimensions of both movements, derived from internal material, can be extrapolated in order to supply patterns of thought and action that can then be applied to the study of other contemporary political movements.

My analysis focuses primarily on the immediate following of the leader and not on the “general voter.” Thus I look closely at those who surround the leader, from cabinet members and party officials to the militants themselves. I take a closer look at the dynamics of what Eatwell has called, in opposition to mass charisma, the “charisma of the coterie,” that is, “a hardcore of supporters both in their inner courts and more locally who held that a special mission drove the leader, and who accorded this leader great loyalty and were willing to make special efforts on behalf of the cause.”⁹² In his study on Nazism Kershaw introduced the distinction between the “charismatic community” comprised of those “who formed the initial agency of transmission of the personality cult surrounding him” and “the mass of ‘Hitler believers’ in the population at large.”⁹³ Another study by Emrich *et al*, drawing from the vast organizational literature on charismatic leadership, has explained this distinction in terms of “public charisma” as perceived by a broad audience of followers, and “private charisma” as perceived by a “narrower band of followers, all of whom have both direct contact and relationships with the leader.”⁹⁴ It is this more personal, private, coterie form of charisma that I call “missionary” that serves as the center of my thesis.

The data I use to make my argument reflects my primary concern with the self-perception of the group. My aim is to establish the phenomenological reality of the collective movement through the use of first-person accounts: Therefore, speeches, party

nuovo areopago: credenze e forme religiose nell' forma postsecolare, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 1994 (especially chapter 9).

⁹² Eatwell, Roger, “The Rebirth of Right-Wing Charisma? The cases of Jean-Marie Le Pen and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol.3, No.3, Winter 2002, p.19.

⁹³ Kershaw, Ian, *Hitler*, Pearson Education Limited, Harlow, England, 2001, pp.15-17.

literature, election programs, party newspapers, friendly newspapers, biographies, memoirs, books by the leaders and officials, and interviews with officials and militants constitute my primary sources of evidence. In this way, my approach is similar to that of Lindholm who, in his pursuit of identifying the dynamics of charismatic movements, defended the necessity to enter the world of the participants “by listening attentively to their own accounts” and not just to the abstractions of theory.⁹⁵ I hypothesize that these are indeed charismatic political movements whose dynamics and features are those of a political religion. If the hypothesis of the development of missionary politics is validated by the study of these case studies, then this will help to explain the persistence of charisma in contemporary democratic politics and provide a model of the form in which these movements are likely to take in the future.

7. Plan of the Thesis

In the next two chapters I attempt to identify the features of the sacralization of politics in these movements, paying attention to the actual inner workings, rhetorical tropes, ritual performances, and social organization of what I consider to be two paradigmatic examples of modern missionary political movements. In synch with my clustered approach to Missionary Politics, I look at how the group presents itself as a “chosen people” following its “charismatic missionary leader” and engaged in a battle for “salvation.” In the creation of this missionary narrative, the leader plays a fundamental role; therefore my study is primarily a leader-oriented approach. However, because the development of a missionary discourse implies the formation of a close-knit community, my analysis will also inevitably focus on some of the internal dynamics of the followership. In the final chapter my last chapter I draw from my empirical findings and lay out the different features of sacralization of politics of both movements in a comparative manner, attempting to integrate all the findings in order to construct – using

⁹⁴ Emrich, C.G., H.H. Brower, J.M. Feldman and H. Garland, “Images in words: Presidential rhetoric, charisma and greatness,” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No.3, September 2001, p.534.

scholarly work from different disciplines – an ideal type of missionary politics that can serve as a baseline for further comparative research into the religious dimension of contemporary political movements. I hope this to be my major contribution for the field of social sciences.

⁹⁵ Lindholm, Charles, *Charisma*, *op.cit*, p.89.

Le Pen and the National Front

In this chapter dedicated to the movement of Le Pen and in the next that follows dedicated to the movement of Umberto Bossi I identify the features of the sacralization of politics in each, focusing on the actual inner workings, rhetorical tropes, ritual performances, and social organization of what I consider to be two paradigmatic examples of modern missionary political movements.

1. Rejection of the Present: the Crisis

At the very basis of Le Pen's discourse is a rejection of the present. Le Pen constructs a narrative intended to imprint deeply in the public mind an image of himself as a hero ready to save a country riddled by corruption and decline, and unable to survive without help. France's "liberation" from the "crisis" of the present is an omnipresent theme in Le Pen's discourse. To understand the crisis at the center of Le Pen's discourse, one needs a closer look at his concept of "The Nation." The party platform of the *Front National* (National Front) has a section headlined *La Mémoire* (The Memory) which states that "It is [by] respecting their founding principles that human societies can perpetuate themselves. Society is not the result of a contract but the outcome of an Order. Nothing can be done without submission to this law ... Under abusive and intoxicating universal changes, is hidden a big and profound law of immobility ... In reality there is, in the continuity of civilizations and peoples, a pre-established harmony, reflection of the Creation, called Cosmos by the Greeks, that means Order."⁹⁶

According to the National Front's philosophy, the nation is not modern. Rather, the nation is primordial: It is a natural body, permanent and based on a spiritual and

⁹⁶ "Le Front National: Les Documents-Le Programme", in www.frontnational.com

physical continuity between the past and the present. It is not an abstraction or a creation of the intellect. The nation is a concrete reality. The program of the National Front uses as its main historical resource the defense of tradition and historical continuity propounded by French historians Ernest Renan and Hippolite Taine. Above all, this concept of nation represents a rejection both of the enlightenment and of the “abstraction” and “universalism” brought by the French revolution of 1789.

In the philosophy of the French National Front, the nation is not a community of citizens, a group of people detached from their ethnic or religious origins around a social contract or a political project. On the contrary, the nation is a community bonded by a continuity of generations, all of which share the same language and belong to the same historical France. “What we have more in common between us and with our compatriots that are abroad,” said Le Pen to his sympathizers “is the notion of heritage, [France’s] material heritage accumulated by centuries of work and sacrifices, by all the generations that have preceded us, [France’s] immense moral and cultural heritage.”⁹⁷ “It took more than a thousand years,” he said at another time, “to establish the French nation, in its historical homogeneity, in its culture and language.”⁹⁸

Although Le Pen has always rejected the label, the National Front is commonly put on the “extreme right” party family. Le Pen rejects the term as being more “polemical than scientific” and has always defined his party as “a movement of the *national* right, the *national* opposition.”⁹⁹ In his analysis of the ideology of the extreme-right, Cas Mudde writes that the underlying elements of an extreme right wing discourse base themselves upon nationalism: “All parties are first and foremost nationalist parties,” he notes, “aspiring for the congruence of state (the political unit) and nation (the cultural unit). The state should implement a policy of internal homogenization to create a monocultural society.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, the problems that (according to Le Pen) affect France -- excessive immigration, insecurity, unemployment -- are only symptoms of a deeply

⁹⁷ “Le banquet des 10 000”, Paris, May 10 1987, La Documentation française, in Soucheter, Maryse, S. Wahnich, I. Cuminal and V. Wathier, *Le Pen Les mots : Analyse d’un discours d’extrême droite*, Editions Le Monde, 1998. p.96.

⁹⁸ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, “Le Discours de La Trinité : Démarxiser la France”, in *Présent*, August 30-September 2 1991, p.8.

⁹⁹ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d’Abord*, Carrere-Michel Lafon, Paris, 1984. p.180.

¹⁰⁰ Mudde, Cas *The Ideology of the Extreme Right*, Manchester University Press, 2002 (paperback edition), p. 177.

rooted malaise of national identity extending as far back in history as the Enlightenment. In Le Pen's narrative the Enlightenment initiated a process of undermining of national identity and values that will inexorably lead to the end of the nation itself. This scenario of national crisis serves as the background in which Le Pen develops a narrative that portrays the National Front as the last defenders of "The Nation" and Le Pen as its savior, united in the mission of saving France from the onslaught of the forces of corruption and decadence. To understand this, I will first show how Le Pen creates and reinforces the identity of the group as the "true France."

2. The Group as the "Elected"

• Historical continuity

In his discourse, Le Pen constantly aims at replacing the dominant historical paradigm with an alternative vision of French history. The prevalent, mainstream version promotes the values of the French Revolution of 1789 through the French *resistance* to the Nazi occupation as the solid basis of the Republic. Le Pen sees this version of history as an artificial creation of modernity that is ultimately dismissive of the true pre-modern and Christian roots of the French nation. The France heralded by Le Pen is the France that is heir to the Galois, Celts and Franks. In the words of Le Pen, "the first martyr of the national independence"¹⁰¹ was the Gallic leader Vercingétorix who defied the rule of the Roman emperor. A main reference in the historical repertoire of Le Pen is Clovis I, the king of Franks who, in the 6th century, unified the French territory with Paris as its capital. He also converted to Christianity. The National Front connects his reign to the foundation of a unified and Christian France. "In this way [the baptism of Clovis]," declared Le Pen in a speech, "achieved the sacred union of Christianity, the Roman civilization, and the youthful vigor of the Frank people that would become, through fifteen centuries, the French people." He added, "We are the heirs of this prestigious

destiny.”¹⁰² In 1996 the National Front celebrated the 1500 anniversary of the baptism of Clovis in the cathedral of Reims, with several festivities and meetings all over France. In the preface of a book published by the party to celebrate the anniversary Le Pen stressed his party’s celebration as authentic because “a true celebration of the foundational moments of the French Nation can only come from those who have a filial relationship [with the nation].” Celebrations derived “from the cold analysts of a disembodied history” or from “subsidized official commemorations” lacked true legitimacy.¹⁰³

The most celebrated historical figure in the imaginary of the National Front is the 15th century French martyr Joan of Arc who organized the resistance against English invaders and was tortured and burned at the stake. Le Pen’s tributes to Joan of Arc are always passionate, and he constantly establishes a parallel between her fight and the National Front. Asked in an interview which role model he would suggest to European youth Le Pen gave the name of this “first and most complete symbol of France.” In his view, “in this national heroine, patriot saint, and champion of Christianity, we find the youth, the people, the faith and the sacrifice, all the things than compose civilization. He continued, “half a millennium ago, she was the precursor of a national France.”¹⁰⁴ In a speech Le Pen declared,

What was the plot 600 years ago? It was to deliver France to the king of England, with the complicity of the University of Paris, the church of France and feudal intrigues. What is the plot today? It is to put an end to the independence and inalienable sovereignty of France and to amalgamate her in a so-called European unity that knows no geographical and political limits – with the complicity of those who have the sacred mission of defending France.¹⁰⁵

The principles that inspired Joan of Arc’s mission in the past are the principles that inspire Le Pen’s mission in the present: “Faith in the eternal France, love for the homeland, defense of the people, authority, independence, identity, security, courage,

¹⁰¹ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, “Le Discours du Serment de Reims”, *Présent*, 14-15 Septembre 1992, p.6.

¹⁰² Le Pen, Jean-Marie, “Le Discours de Jean-Marie Le Pen aux BBR”, *Présent*, 5 Octobre 1995, p.6.

¹⁰³ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, “Préface” in Brissaud, Jean-Marc, *Clovis Roy des Francs – célébration nationale du 1500 anniversaire*, Paris, Editions Nationales, 1996, p.5.

¹⁰⁴ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *L’Espoir*, Editions Albatros, Paris, 1989, p.154.

¹⁰⁵ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Fête de Jeanne d’Arc du 1er Mai 1998,” May 1 1998, in www.frontnational.com

gathering, faith, honor and sacrifice. Those were her values. Today they are our values.”¹⁰⁶

At the same time, the French history promoted by Le Pen is nostalgic for the old French empire. Refusing to accept what he calls the unjust official version of colonization as a shameful period, Le Pen asserts that “its advantages were far greater than we want to admit.”¹⁰⁷ To him, “history has been unfair toward the men of the Third Republic, the founders of the second French colonial empire ... those men that led the colonization - what today is referred to in a pejorative and unjust way as ‘colonialism’ - had above all the purpose of propagating the European civilization to the men of the whole world.”¹⁰⁸ In the eyes of Le Pen, two events symbolize above all the loss of the past imperial grandiosity of France. The first is the military defeat of Diên-Biên-Phủ that marked the end of the French rule in Indochina; the second is the loss of the French colony of Algeria. They are seen above all as humiliating events that symbolize the lack of political will and outright treason by the French political establishment. “The defeat of Diên Biên Phủ,” he said to one of his biographers, “is a little like the twilight of Gods for France, a warning from history that will not be understood.”¹⁰⁹ In a phrase that reveals his mindset Le Pen once wrote, “I was aware that the only countries that could play a role in the world would be those who had a geopolitical but also economic and strategic space. If not [France] would be reduced to a little hexagon in the Asiatic peninsula that is Europe.”¹¹⁰

Another subject of friction between the French History heralded by Le Pen and the dominant History of the French political-cultural establishment has to do with the Second World War and the role played by two major figures, General Charles de Gaulle and Marshal Pétain. Le Pen considers that the “leftist-oriented” version of the events promote a slanderous image of the man who was the head of the collaborationist regime of Vichy (1941-1944). For him Pétain was a “true patriot” who thought above all in the best interests of France. The leader of the National front is clear about the moral equivalence he sees between those who joined the resistance and those who collaborated. “They had a common attachment to the fatherland”, he noted,

¹⁰⁶ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Fête de Jeanne d’Arc du 1^{er} Mai 1999,” May 1, 1999, in *www.frontnational.com*

¹⁰⁷ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *L’Espoir*, *op.cit.*, p.46.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.38.

¹⁰⁹ Marcilly, Jean, *Le Pen Sans Bandeau*, Jacques Grancher, Paris, 1984, p.109.

True, they worked on different sides [for the fatherland], but from the moment they are sincere and courageous they are part, without knowing it ... of the same side, that of the men who are capable of giving their lives and shedding their blood for a superior cause ... Since my adolescence I have never accepted the Manichaeism between the Resistance and the Collaboration. My life experience made me conscious of the relativity of events and engagements, and I understood perfectly well that we could want to serve our country in the resistance to the German occupation as well as in the service of the strategy of the Marshall Pétain or fighting bolshevism.¹¹¹

However, Le Pen also takes issue with the “official version” of the resistance to the Nazis, for “it was the national right who led the combat against the occupant and the legend of a collaborationist right and a resistant left was forged by the communists after the war.”¹¹² To put himself in a better light, the Leader of the National Front provides an alternative historical version of the traumatic events of World War II.

Le Pen puts much emphasis on this battle for the memory of France. To him there is a good memory hearkening back to Gallia and the Christian origins of France and accentuating the natural order at the basis of the nation. At the same time there is a bad memory, inaugurated by the Enlightenment, that tries to promote a false and artificial order. If there is a historical figure in the discourse of Le Pen who epitomizes the subversion of natural order, it is French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. To Le Pen Rousseau is guilty of creating a utopian strain in Western thought that led to attempts to create a forced uniformity of values and ways of living. “The Rousseau-istic dream – that inspired socialism, communism and liberalism – feeds off of *bluettes*, humanitarian feelings, of love and utopias but leads to civil war, anarchy and tyranny.”¹¹³ To him a good example of this danger is the reign of terror that followed the French revolution of 1789. “You tell me,” he said “that Europe is going to celebrate the French Revolution but unfortunately the revolution originated the first great bloodbath of Modern Europe ... it

¹¹⁰ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d'Abord*, op.cit, p.49.

¹¹¹ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, “La mort en face: Un livre pour tous les Français qui ont donné leur vie pour la France,” in Marcel Hasquenoph et al., *La Mort en Face*, Publications François Brigneau, 1993, pp.XXII,XXIII.

¹¹² “Jean-Marie Le Pen – 17eme Fête des Bleu-Blanc-Rouge,” 26 septembre 1997 in www.frontnational.com

¹¹³ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d'Abord*, op.cit, p.118.

opened the way to mass massacres.”¹¹⁴ In this light, Robespierre and Saint-Just, for example, play the role of veritable *bêtes noires* in the narrative of Le Pen. The Declaration of the Rights of Man originated from the French Revolution is above all another step into forcing peoples and cultures to lose their specific traits and amalgamate into a bland, uncharacteristic and artificial “universalistic” order. In 1979, for example, Le Pen accused then president of the Republic Giscard D’Estaing of forgetting his right-wing credentials because of his “Rousseau-istic, humanitarian utopian and globalist philosophy.” To him that was a “philosophy of the left, not of the right.”¹¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, in Le Pen’s historical imagination the events of 1968 were “a decisive stage towards decadence,” representing, “the self-awareness of a country that realizes it is not a great country anymore and that abandons itself ... 1968 it is the nausea. It is an act of despair, of disenchantment.”¹¹⁶ 1968 represents, therefore, a powerful moment of the undermining of tradition and authority that was corrupting the natural fabric of France since the beginning of Modern times.

For Le Pen, the French political-cultural establishment was guilty of dishonesty and treason by actively pursuing the redefinition of France’s history. The history they promoted was not the true and natural history of France: “What they want, those sclerotics [political class], is to tear off, piece by piece, entire sections of our history, our collective imaginary, our memory. It is her [the memory] that they want to darken, as we can see in their successful efforts, *hélas*, in our schools to sabotage the history of France.”¹¹⁷ To counterbalance this, Le Pen and the National Front offer a truly distinct history. Le Pen puts at the very center of his speeches, interviews, and symbolic gestures this alternative history of his country. The choice of figures from the past reveals the intention to underscore what is constant, permanent, and stable in the history of France. Underneath the convulsion of past and current events lies a historical line of continuity where the pillars of the nation are rooted. It is above all a spiritual heritage. As written in

¹¹⁴ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *L’Espoir*, *op.cit.*, p.152.

¹¹⁵ Le Pen, Jean-Marie “Le Front National,” in Apparu, Jean-Pierre, *La Droite Aujourd’hui*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1979. p.175.

¹¹⁶ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d’Abord*, *op.cit.*, pp. 54,55.

¹¹⁷ “Intervention de Jean-Marie Le Pen – Fête de Jeanne d’Arc du 1^{er} Mai 1998,” in www.frontnational.com

the program of the National Front, “France possesses a system of values that embraces time and space.”¹¹⁸

What is most important to note is that there is a relentless effort by Le Pen to connect the National Front and its supporters to an historical continuity that harkens back to the beginning of France. “The National Front is the Union of the indigenous of this country,”¹¹⁹ wrote Le Pen. As he declared in a speech,

Our effort [is to] rejuvenate in permanence the eternal message of which we are the guardians and bearers ... We are the sons and daughters of the party of the homeland. We are the sons and daughters of those who have not measured their efforts working, who have not measured their efforts in sacrifice in wars, in order to transmit to their children the sun, the language, the liberty, the beauty and wealth, fruits of the millenarian effort of our people. We can only be proud of the mission accomplished and [have] immense gratitude regarding those who have trusted in us the mission.¹²⁰

• The Definition of the Group

Le Pen defines the National Front, his group, his militants and supporters, as the true representatives of France. In fact, in the alternative version of history provided by Le Pen, they *are* France. Le Pen wrote,

From Clovis to Jean de Brem [Supporter of the *Algérie Française* who died in confronts with the police] From Joan of Arc to Barrès, Bainville and Maurras there is the same flame that goes through our history. We, militants and supporters of the National Front, write a new page of our saga. We are a link in the immense chain of generations. We do not have the pretension to reinvent the world, but more modestly and humanely to preserve the heritage, to defend a certain idea of a strong, generous and fraternal France. In that sense, notwithstanding it displeases our adversaries, we are on the first sense of the term, the last heirs of classical humanism that is an integral part of our patrimony. Our political roots are noble, good, and beautiful. To defend them is not only defend our memory, our way of life and way of seeing the world, but also preserve our future from the clouds of Barbary that crowd the skies of the third millennium.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ “Le Front national, les Documents: Le programme”, in *www.frontnational.com*

¹¹⁹ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *La France est de Retour*, Carrere-Michel Lafon, Paris, 1985, p.51.

¹²⁰ “Discours de Saint-Franc – 25 Mai 1991,” in Le Pen, Jean-Marie, “Le Pen 91: analyses et propositions,” Editions de Present, Maule, 1992, pp. 103-107

¹²¹ Jean-Marie Le Pen “Entendez le Chant du Peuple Français,” in *Présent*, September 6 1996.

What is particularly relevant to note is that in that Le Pen describes those who join the National Front as a true vanguard of men and women who constitute the best of the French population. They are the Elect who have the sacred mission of defending France. “Our responsibility is immense,” claimed Le Pen in a speech, “and let me tell you what Churchill used to say to the English pilots of June 1940: ‘never was so much owed by so many to so few.’ Well, I am sure that tomorrow France will be grateful to the most courageous, the most lucid and the most devoted of her daughters and sons who have constituted the walking wing of the recovery and national renaissance.”¹²² In the discourse of Le Pen the supporters of the National Front are indeed the remnant few, upon whose shoulders rests the responsibility of saving France. This empowerment of the followers is a chief element of the discourse of Le Pen. In a speech in he declared,

Since we have engaged in political combat, you know very well, my dear comrades, we do not seek power for the sake of power, but to apply the ideas that we think are just when the France that suffers, of who we are the voice, will call us for help. We are the *guetteurs au créneau*, those who awaken our people, the voices in the night. It is true, we fight in a hurry against decadence. But as long as there are men to love France and to devote themselves to her, as long there is a French people, conscious of itself, there will be a serious hope of victory.”¹²³

The overall French population is guilty of letting the evils that afflict society to take hold putting the nation in a path of decline and decadence. The rest of the French trusted and gave its support to the forces of corruption and, therefore, is indirectly responsible for the crisis of the nation. In this context, the National Front sees itself as a besieged community that undergoes terrible persecutions, sufferings, and sacrifice in order to keep alive the spirit of the “true France” and, in the end, to redeem the mistakes and errors of the entire community. In his discourse Le Pen alludes to two Frances; one is passive and weak, the other is militant and strong, spiritually pure. This “militant France” is, in his words, “a conscious France that has adhered to the analysis of the National Front, that has understood the reasons of our decadence and that fights.” “This militant France,” Le Pen adds, “is suffering also. But it is suffering with hope, because action in

¹²² “Discours de Saint Franc – 25 Mai 1991,” *op.cit.* p.145

¹²³ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – 21^{ème} Fête des Bleu-Blanc-Rouge 2001,” September 23 2001, in www.frontnational.com

the good direction can pull her out from despair.”¹²⁴ In fact, the “other” France is constituted by the part of the French population who has for a long time been brainwashed and stripped of its character, identity, and true nature. The role of the National Front is therefore and literally to show the light to those who are in darkness. “A lot of our compatriots have lost sight of everything that they risk losing,” declared Le Pen, “We need to enlighten and unite them.”¹²⁵ Le Pen has many times denounced the “civic apathy” of the population: To him “the public spirit looks as if is in a state of advanced coma.”¹²⁶ On a separate occasion, he declared that “in the state of paralysis, coma-like in which the country finds itself it is necessary to prepare a daring and firm therapy in order to restore its strength and youth.”¹²⁷

This lethargy is the sole thing that keeps the rest of the French population from joining the forces of French renaissance. Although they are not aware, the French people are enslaved to corrupt forces hell-bent on cutting away their roots. “We are the true liberators of the people of France,”¹²⁸ is a permanent motto in the discourse of the leader of the National Front. In describing the National Front’s opposition to globalization Le Pen sheds light on this dialectic between the passive France, seduced by the devil of globalization, and the militant France, standing for truth and goodness.

This project [globalization], cynically conceived, is so monstrous that the majority of the people do not believe it, do not even see that the project has already started, aggravated by the *dénatalité* [declining birthrate] of our continent and the aging of our populations. Until now, we have been the only ones to see clear and to try to open the eyes and the ears of the future slaves. Millions have understood us and trust us but the System [sic] has created fear. That is why we are persecuted ... [We have] an irresistible appetite for freedom and independence. That is why it would be mad and criminal to lose hope of saving France and liberate the French. When, with our help, with the National Front, they become conscious of the danger, their cholera will be terrible.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ “Discours du Bourget BBR – 13 octobre 1991,” in Le Pen, Jean-Marie *Le Pen 91*, *op.cit.*, pp.316.317

¹²⁵ “Le Discours de Jean-Marie Le Pen aux BBR,” in *Présent*, October 5, 1995, p.6.

¹²⁶ “Ralliez-vous à mom panache tricolore,” in *National-Hebdo*, 14-20 January 1999.

¹²⁷ “Université d’été du Front National à Enghein,” August 28, 2004, in www.nationalfront.com

¹²⁸ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – immigration et souveraineté,” January 27 2002, in www.nationalfront.com

¹²⁹ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Fête de Jeanne d’Arc du 1^{er} Mai 2000,” in www.fronnational.com

• The Group is under Siege

After defining the group as the ultimate guardian of “eternal France” Le Pen reinforces its identity by portraying the National Front as a community under siege. The discourse of Le Pen evolves around the idea of *menace*, threat. It is rhetoric of perpetual fear. The hierarchy of the enemies might change slightly over time but the targeting of enemies is always present. The enemies loom everywhere. They are either internal or external to the community. Internally, close attention is paid to the political-media establishment. “You can, my dear compatriots,” stated Le Pen,

Today, be proud of yourselves, proud of the National Front and of everything that it has achieved after twenty years of its foundation; like the sailor, we also have known fatigue and discouragement. Sometimes even despair. But we have surmounted it. We have been victims of lies, defamation and persecution. And we continued to be ... we are truly treated in our country in that domain [the media] but also many others, as authentic pariahs.¹³⁰

Why since its origins has the National Front been the object of persecution? Why is it that the community of “true France” is marginalized? To Le Pen the reason is simple. The National Front is the only party that informs the French people of the truth about the threats imperiling the nation’s survival. The vehement denunciation of this process of marginalization by the “political-media caste” has always been a chief element in the Front’s self-perception. Le Pen calls the French Republic a totalitarian democracy that aims at the destruction of the only “national opposition” to “The “System.”¹³¹ Since the foundation of the party there has been a widespread phenomenon of “intellectual terrorism” that was launched to prevent the National Front, the open-eyed “militant France,” from waking up the sleepy-eyed “passive France.” According to Le Pen the ultimate aim of this “intellectual terrorism” is to produce “brainless citizens”:

It serves to deny the people the knowledge of realities he should know, to reduce [the people] to a blind and deaf mass, dazed by the unanimous and monolithical propaganda. It has as a goal concealing real problems, like the taboo, of immigration ... Little by little, because of the

¹³⁰ “Discours du Bourget BBR – 13 Octobre 1991,” *op.cit.*, pp.299-301

¹³¹ See, for example, “Jean-Marie Le Pen, université d’été du Front National à Annecy,” August 30 2002, in www.frontnational.com

criminalization of our movement and our ideas, the French were forbidden to think, to reflect about the problems of our society ... it is this intellectual terrorism, totally irrational, that explains why our movement is today excluded from the official political field.¹³²

The internal enemies are therefore all of those whom Le Pen sees as “foreign forces” or members of the party of “anti-France.” They include the mainstream media, the politicians of The System and all of those who are considered servants of the powerful forces of globalization, dedicated to the destruction of France and to the creation of an artificial world order, from immigrant activists to freemasons to human rights activists. Le Pen pays crucial attention to the enemies within the group of The Elect, itself, warning constantly against hidden traitors, which helps to keep the group’s internal mobilization and energy level high. Past examples of traitors serve as admonition against the fate of future traitors.

In this way, and men are what they are, it is convenient that no one loses sight of the fact that the risks of division that threaten all the human formations cannot develop within [our group]. We have to put aside all temptation of friction, to ban all worthless oppositions and devastating defamations. The individual ambition and the overestimation of the Self have led Mégret to the criminal adventure of the split.¹³³

The external enemies are the internationalist forces that put the French nation at danger. This theme is always present in rhetoric, though the primacy and even the face of the enemies may change over time. At the beginning the National Front saw as the greatest danger the Soviet Empire. “If there is a threat today it is the soviet [threat],” wrote Le Pen,

It is time, not of choosing between being ‘red or dead’ or to give to our anguish or fear the form of capitulation, but on the contrary [to opt for the road] of resistance against death, we have to prepare ourselves to a confrontation that could be military, subversive or revolutionary, we know that there will be a winner and a loser and that our country risks of being the lose, even Europe and the Western World, if we do not know how to mobilize our forces to survive and win.¹³⁴

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Université d’été du Front National à Annecy,” *op.cit.*

¹³⁴ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d’Abord*, *op.cit.*, p.145.

The Soviet threat was closely linked to the other big threat, massive immigration. Le Pen has incessantly talked about the “third world hegemony” that due to “the demographic explosion in the third world, particularly the Arabic-Islamic World, penetrates our country and is on the verge of colonizing it.”¹³⁵ The communists were promoting this development because immigration had the final goal of preparing the way for a communist revolution in France.

For more than forty years the improvement of the standard of life of the working class posed a problem to the Marxists. The members of the national proletariat, once heralded as the iron spear of the Revolution, looked more and more thin. How to preserve the customers? ... The call to immigration is one of the answers to this question. In importing the misery, welcoming a foreigner proletariat, they preserve the relevance of class warfare, hoping at the same time to make those foreigners vote.¹³⁶

Communism, therefore, promoted an internationalist ideology that was at odds with the natural order championed by Le Pen and the National Front.

After the fall of the Soviet Empire, Le Pen immediately found as a substitute what he calls the “American empire” guilty too of imposing the tyranny of globalization on the nations of the earth, with the help of cronies such as the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and Human Rights Organizations. The indictment of the United States of America started to be particularly visible after the end of the cold war and the first Gulf War. The United States is seen as the driving force behind the implementation of a New World Order. Le Pen blasts what he calls the “American universalism,” which is based on the “fundamentalism of the market.”¹³⁷

The objective of this universalism, said Le Pen, is to create,

a World Government that will run the world in the next century. The Europe of Brussels is, in practice, its ally. She [the European Union] was created to be just another stage in the process of globalization. [We have] borders that disappear, local and cultural specificities that blur to the advantage of an universal culture, an ideology of human rights elevated to the rank of Holy Gospel, an appearance of democracy, a planetarian market economy, one currency (why not the dollar?), and the belt is buckled. The World Village is not a whim anymore. We witness, powerlessly, the edification of a true totalitarianism [that is] much more vicious than communism and much more destructive than it. It’s not an outlandish scenario anymore, a scenario of science

¹³⁵ “Les Déclarations du Président du Front National sur Antenne 2,” in *Le Monde*, February 15 1984.

¹³⁶ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *La France est de Retour*, *op.cit.*, p.228.

¹³⁷ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – 21^{ème} Fête des Bleu-Blanc-Rouge 2001,” *op.cit.*

fiction, but a nightmare: a communism 'light' or a totalitarianism 'soft', the endgame is the same!¹³⁸

The European Union is therefore integrated in the malevolent globalizing process that is determined to strangle and eventually substitute the natural system of diversity of nations with an artificial and disruptive "internationalist" system. Le Pen described the approval of a new European-wide Constitution as just one more step towards this doomsday scenario. In a revelatory statement he said,

In creating a Constitution it is therefore hoped the emergence of a [European] Nation, which means that [the goal] is to create one by force, destroying the historical nations that have shaped the essence of world history, reducing them to a range of provinces. The intention is to make a European Nation but what will emerge is a new empire, a prison of peoples, which will meet the destiny of all the multinational artificial constructions, that is, a quick disappearance amid probable dramatic upheavals. We are at the very heart of a new totalitarian utopia [that seeks to establish] a total break with fundamental political principles of European civilization, a civilization of free peoples, thus sovereigns.¹³⁹

Another powerful threat to France comes from Islam. The National Front, particularly since the late eighties has intensified its opposition to the development of Islamic culture and practices in the French territory. The National Front has led the opposition to the construction of mosques, a sure sign of the "conquering Islam."¹⁴⁰ Le Pen has always blamed what he calls the "immigration lobbies" for this trend that threatens the survival of the "*France Française*", that is Western and Christian. For him immigrants of Islamic countries, contrary to immigrants of other European countries, are impossible to assimilate because they are "ethnic and cultural" foreigners to French identity. The immigration lobbies use Islam as a weapon "against our country ... in order to eradicate from our spiritual and intellectual universe everything that attaches us to the Western, Humanist and Christian civilization."¹⁴¹

The French government and the politicians of the system, left and right, are nothing more than collaborators in this process of globalization and massification

¹³⁸ "Jean-Marie Le Pen – Université d'été 1999 du Front National à Orange," September 3, 1999 in www.frontnational.com

¹³⁹ "Université d'été 2004 du Front National à Enghein," *op.cit.*

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, *National-Hebdo*, "Dreux en voie d'Islamization," April 20-25, 1996.

¹⁴¹ "Le cri du muezzin," in *Identité : Revue d'Études Nationales*, March-April 1990, p.3

“launched against France,”¹⁴² sycophants of their masters. In this context Le Pen sees the National Front, the group of the “Elect,” as absolutely essential in fighting for a France that has been attacked by powerful forces and abandoned by everyone but the National Front. Not one opportunity goes by without Le Pen reminding his followers of the crucial role they play as the remnant few, the remnant patriots, the sons and daughters of the real France who are struggling to maintain its integrity against overwhelming forces of evil.

If Globalization is nothing more than a metamorphosis of History ... a consequence of the abandon of the moral and civic rules that have governed us for centuries, then, we have to deal with what she is, a materialistic ideology following the example of communism, against which we have and we must fight in order to escape from it. It falls upon the most lucid, the most courageous and wise, to mobilize the peoples to assure in the world of tomorrow not only the defense of the Rights of Man, but also those of the Rights of the Soul [in order to do that] we have to take inspiration from the successes and failures of more than three millennia of civilization.¹⁴³

This rhetoric of fear is intended to strengthen the perception of the group as a besieged community. It is also closely aligned with a rhetoric of conspiracy. An anti-national, internationalist plan has been gaining ground for a long time since the Enlightenment. Its current face is the neo-liberalist and American-led Globalization. Le Pen connects the dots and forms a coherent picture about a changing reality. Everything is part of a plan diabolic in scope and goal. The creation of a united and federal Europe, for example, is meticulously included in this *mondialiste*, and cosmopolitan project. Le Pen talks about “a secret plan imagined by Jean Monnet” who fell under the influence of the “big international American banks,” and became an apostle of a supranational United States of Europe. The implementation of this plan was made with the help of three organizations: The Council for Foreign Relations, the Bilderberg Group and the Trilateral commission.¹⁴⁴ This plan encourages the collapse of birth rates in Europe and a policy of open borders and massive immigration; both intended to soften and ultimately destroy national identity. Le Pen explains the rationale,

¹⁴² “Jean-Marie Le Pen – 17^{ème} Fête des Bleu-Blanc-Rouge,” September 26, 1997, in www.frontrnational.com

¹⁴³ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Université d’été 1999 du Front National à Orange,” *op.cit.*,

¹⁴⁴ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Fête de Jeanne d’Arc du 1^{er} Mai 1998,” May 1, 1998, in www.frontrnational.com

The internationalists want to organize the world according to their own utopias, fundamentally anti-national, anti-religion and inhuman. Men and women will be sacrificed to Humanity [sic] and the self-appointed experts will define and organize their happiness. This happiness will be the same on all the continents ... We recognize [in this plan], without any doubt, the same totalitarianism responsible in the 20th century of the death and suffering of hundreds of million of men and women. In order to accomplish this Orwellian project it is necessary to uproot the people and to dissolve the familiar, religious, civic, social and associational links ... that is why the family and the Nation [sic] are their main targets. The family because it is the material link of the transmission of life and moral values. The Nation [sic] because it is a superior principle of effective solidarity, dignity and security.¹⁴⁵

Le Pen derides the overall human rights philosophy -- part of the American-led, totalitarian ideology hell-bent on the implementation of a "world government by Big Brother,"¹⁴⁶ -- as "*Droit de l'hommeisme*." Le Pen accuses, for example, groups such as *SOS Racisme*, *Licra* (Ligue Internationale contre le Racisme et L'Antisémitisme) and *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme* of being "anti-French."¹⁴⁷ Under the disguise of liberalism these groups want to impose an abstract and rootless program of Humanity on the natural and rooted realities of Nations and Le Pen accuses them of racism against the French. Behind the *complot*, the conspiracy, Le Pen sees the work of specific international organizations. He frequently mentions the Freemasonry and International Jewish Organizations. He cites the secret freemasonry organization *Grand Orient* as having an absolute control over a large number of French politicians. Another of his targets is the Jewish international organization *B'nai B'rith* which is accused of having a powerful grip on the French political system and of being a driving force towards World Government. Le Pen says repeatedly that the National Front is free of the influence of such obscure forces. "It is true," he declared "that we do not obey to the talking points of any organization neither foreign like the *B'nai B'rith*, or internal as the *Grand Orient* ... like so many of the elected officials of the so-called Republic"¹⁴⁸ Le Pen also denounces the neo-liberal Trilateral Commission formed by David Rockefeller in 1973, accusing it of putting minions in important political positions and controlling them behind the scenes, playing an important role in the army of the "Big Brother." All of these groups are

¹⁴⁵ "Jean-Marie Le Pen – Fête de Jeanne d'Arc du 1^{er} Mai 2000," May 1, 2000 in www.frontnational.com

¹⁴⁶ "Jean-Marie Le Pen – Université d'été du Front National à Orange," September 3 1999, in www.frontnational.com

¹⁴⁷ *Français d'Abord! Quotidien*, February 17 2004.

¹⁴⁸ "Jean-Marie Le Pen – 17^{ème} Fête des Bleu-Blanc-Rouge," September 26 1997.

depicted as “forces that aspire to establish a reductive, global and equalizing ideology [by] playing a non negligible role in the creation of an anti-national spirit.”¹⁴⁹

In sum, by claiming a worldwide conspiracy against his small group, Le Pen manages to give his followers a portrayal of their crucial role as defenders of France and French values in a period of rapid change. It provides his people a model for understanding the world that makes a complex and seemingly chaotic situation more rational and the role of the National Front more morally compelling. It also depicts the enemies of the group as powerful, mischievous, and diabolical, which removes any sort of ambiguity in the combat against evil.

The rhetoric of Le Pen is also catastrophic. To emphasize the deep crisis that the Nation is in and the dangers that lie ahead for the remnant patriots Le Pen uses a catastrophic vocabulary. Below are some typical examples of Le Pen’s litany of catastrophic threats to the Republic.

Communism

- “I tell the young men and women of my country: what is being prepared under your eyes is the establishment of the Marxist revolution that leads to the gulag, slavery and death.”¹⁵⁰

- “It is necessary to remind the French that their existence, their freedoms, their prosperity are linked to the survival of the homeland, to the survival of a free Europe and she is objectively threatened. And if this threat is not fought off we will be in the gulag before the end of the century.”¹⁵¹

- “There is no national defense, no matter the material means employed, without a ‘spirit of defense,’ that is without an awareness of the danger, of its nature, its amplitude, its

¹⁴⁹ “M.Le Pen et ‘L’internationale juive,” in *Le Monde*, September 9, 1989.

¹⁵⁰ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *La France est de Retour*, op.cit, p.166.

¹⁵¹ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d’Abord*, op.cit, p.165.

imminence, and without the will to preserve ourselves. The choice to be made is between life and death, between self-chosen sacrifice or slavery.”¹⁵²

Immigration

- “The disastrous policy of our government has had catastrophic consequences because it opened the door, in an uncontrollable manner, to a migratory flux that we don’t even know the reality or statistics ... it is truly a tidal wave.”¹⁵³

- “We are going to assist to a real invasion, of which we have only seen the beginning, that will literally submerge our indigenous populations.”¹⁵⁴

- “We are the victims of a worldwide mutation, of an invasion apparently pacific but that, evidently, is a deadly threat to our identity, our security, our culture.”¹⁵⁵

- “Immigration ... the opening and suppression of our borders ... and the attribution of social benefits have giving it a torrential character, [that will be] cataclysmic in the future. It threatens us of engulfment and, soon submission, which means extinction.”¹⁵⁶

Declining Birthrate

- “Declining birthrate is a mortal phenomenon. If continues, by the decline of vitality coupled with the demographic pressure from the Third World, we will be, before the arrival of the year 2000, submerged.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *L’Espoir*, *op.cit*, p.63

¹⁵³ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d’Abord*, *op.cit*, pp100-101

¹⁵⁴ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *La France est de retour*, *op.cit*, p.288.

¹⁵⁵ Jean-Marie Le Pen “Le Discours de La Trinité : démarxiser la France,” in *Présent*, August 31, 1991.

¹⁵⁶ “Le Pen 2002 – immigration et souveraineté – Paris,” *op.cit*

¹⁵⁷ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *La France est de Retour*, *op.cit*, p.167

- “In effect, the gravest danger that threatens the earth is the collapse of birthrates in the Western World confronted with the birthrate explosion in the Third World. That is why I estimate that homosexuality will drive us, if progresses, to the end of the world.”¹⁵⁸

- “While the lack of babies make us decadent, the rest of the world explodes, literally ... the conditions for a world cataclysm are assembled, and this cataclysm will happen. We have to make sure that this cataclysm does not happen among us.”¹⁵⁹

Globalization

- “[The] triumph of materialism, of the Single Idea [sic], of the New World Order, the planned destruction of nations, the establishment of a totalitarian democracy, form the most hypocritical of tyrannies.”¹⁶⁰

- “We are in the presence of a patient [France] who suffers from cancer and whose pain has been attenuated with palliatives, but where everyone is resigned to its imminent death. Our governments have abdicated! They don’t believe in France anymore, or in Europe. They serve globalization.”¹⁶¹

- “Lets remember the newest and apocalyptical threats that weight on our country, the frantic dictatorship of King-money, the complete miscegenation imposed on our people by a massive immigration and an anti-natality policy monstrously organized, the disappearance of our civilization, our culture.”¹⁶²

Le Pen’s rhetoric is elaborated to create shock. It is deliberately constructed to exaggerate and in some cases caricaturize the problems in order to grab the attention and accentuate that the survival of France is at stake. In order to this Le Pen relentlessly uses biological images and metaphors. This is closely linked with his idea of the nation not a

¹⁵⁸ “M.Le Pen: l’homosexualité c’est la fin du monde,” in *Le Monde*, June 13, 1984.

¹⁵⁹ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – discours de Saint-Franc,” May 25 1991, *op.cit*

¹⁶⁰ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Université d’été 1999 du Front National à Orange,” *op.cit*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

rational “abstract” construction but as an organic living entity. “We know,” wrote Le Pen, “that like all the terrestrial homelands she [France] is mortal, notwithstanding the appearance of its exceptional longevity and because we know that we are even more attached to her.”¹⁶³ The issues are always literally about life and death. There is no middle ground. “The National Front,” he said at another occasion, “is a biopolitical movement, a reaction of health against the threat of death contained in the decadence, subversion and foreigner invasion.”¹⁶⁴ Le Pen has described himself as a “doctor in times of an epidemic outbreak ... when the doctor arrives the people are happy.”¹⁶⁵ In the discourse of Le Pen, France is depicted as a body in decomposition, decaying, putrefying, attacked by all sort of problems that are indeed described as diseases. “The crimes against the nation are all of those which attack its physical, moral and spiritual substance,” said Le Pen, “all of those who explicitly or not want the violent destruction or the rotting of this great organic entity that constitutes the nation.”¹⁶⁶ He has talked about the fact that the “foreigner invasion” creates “gangrene” in France.¹⁶⁷ Unemployment is also described as a “social cancer.”¹⁶⁸ Regarding the proliferation of immigrants and security concerns Le Pen noted that “this proliferation resembles cancer cells, I’m not referring to the immigrants, but the [immigration] process in itself: If it’s not stopped immediately we will soon face forms of civil war or foreign subversive war in our territory.”¹⁶⁹ He has denounced the “mental Aids” that afflicts society and calls his followers to “reconstruct the natural immunities.”¹⁷⁰ A campaign of the National Front in the nineties consisted in establishing a parallel between Aids and socialism: “In politics, in economy in morality Socialism is Aids!”¹⁷¹

¹⁶² “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Fête de Jeanne d’Arc du 1^{er} Mai 2000,” *op.cit.*

¹⁶³ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d’Abord*, *op.cit.*, p.74

¹⁶⁴ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *L’Espoir*, *op.cit.*, p.108.

¹⁶⁵ “Le Pen se voit comme ‘un médecin en période d’épidémie,’” France 1 interview, AFP, November 10, 2003.

¹⁶⁶ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – 17^{ème} Fête des Bleu-Blanc-Rouge,” *op.cit.*

¹⁶⁷ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *La France est de Retour*, p.32.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.51.

¹⁶⁹ “Le Pen : Défendre en toute occasion l’intérêt des Français” in *National-Hebdo*, March 21-27, 1996.

¹⁷⁰ “Selon M.Le Pen, la société est atteinte du ‘sida mental’,” in *Le Monde*, October 3, 1989.

¹⁷¹ Bariller, Damien and Franck Timmermans, *20 Ans au Front: L’Histoire Vraie du Front National*, Editions Nationales, Paris, 1994, p.130.

Intimately linked with the life-death rhetoric and the conflation of his enemies with disease is the constant use of a Social Darwinist philosophy in describing the threats and dangers to the French nation. In a typical manner Le Pen said,

Generally, any weak country is a potential prey to another one who is stronger. Since the beginning of times the surface of the earth has been agitated by fights of influence between conquering countries and submissive countries. Entire nations and civilizations have disappeared because they could not fill the necessary conditions to their own survival.¹⁷²

In this world where only the strongest will survive and the feeble are doomed to demise, France is in real danger. “The weak countries are the targets of all the predators of the world,” declared Le Pen in a speech. “When we are not capable of defending our identity, territory and culture, there will be others who come to impose [their culture] by force, sometimes with fusils, sometimes with *babouches*.”¹⁷³ In a similar note he pointed out in a speech that

Civilizations are, alas, mortal and in different dimensions obey to the rhythms of the universe and, it seems, with stupefying parallelism ... the evolution [of civilizations], their birth, growth, life and death have a common trait noted by Toynbee and Oswald Spengler, Bruyas and Dupâquier, they come to an end due to foreign demographic submersion, when allogenic elements become too great in number to be assimilated, and when [civilizations] let their own vital dynamism weaken. What is known in History as the ‘great invasions’, which led to the death of a civilization, is what we are on the verge of living in our times, *hic et nunc*.¹⁷⁴

The focus on fear, enemies, threats and danger is a powerful mechanism to induce a sense of foreboding in the besieged community. There is a sense of impending tragedy that pervades the rhetoric of Le Pen. He repeatedly calls immigration a “demographic bomb”, “immigration-invasion,” that is out of control and he warns against its “cataclysmic” consequences. Intimately connected is urgency to act. “The danger that threatens our country is a specific danger in the short term,” he wrote. “Our fate will be sealed before the end of the century [20th century].”¹⁷⁵ He said at another occasion, “Before the end of the century we will have reached a point of no return. Then,

¹⁷² Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *L’Espoir*, p.12.

¹⁷³ “M.Le Pen à Marseille devant 20 000 personnes,” in *Le Monde*, April 19 1988.

¹⁷⁴ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Immigration et Souveraineté – Paris,” *op.cit.*

decadence will be irreversible and irreparable. We have only a couple of years of respite left, very short, to inverse the course of the political choices that could create a fundamental change.”¹⁷⁶ “What they hide from you,” Le Pen warned his supporters, “is that France is threatened with disappearance ... before the end of the century, before four years. What Chirac asks from us is to be accomplices of this national suicide.”¹⁷⁷

It is very symptomatic of this sense of impending cataclysm the way Le Pen describes France’s position in regard to globalization and the European Union. In a speech he said,

We must break off from this politics of Death [Federal Europe] and announce that the cooperation with the peoples of Europe must be organized around nations We must combat boldly the Europe of Brussels and break France away from it, with the growing help of all its victims. Europe is working to kill France and all the historical nations of the continent. At the end of this road there is nothing but servitude and war;¹⁷⁸ It is clear that the project, better to say the global conspiracy of which the Trojan Horse is the European Union of Brussels is committed to the goal of destroying the nations for exactly the opposite reasons we want to defend and save them ... it is clear that the Europe of Brussels prepares the death of France.”

• The National Front’s Exceptionality

In its depiction of the tragedy, Le Pen’s discourse obeys a permanent logic of polarization. The National front is portrayed as a community of the “Elect”, the true patriots, the representatives of millenarian France. They are usually described as sane, healthy and pure. Opposed to them are the “Mighty,” the false patriots, those powerful evil forces who want to subvert the structures and history of millenarian France. They are repeatedly described as corrupt traitors who are beholden to secret forces.

The vocabulary of Le Pen is also belligerent, he talks about “battalions” and says that the National Front is engaged in the “battle for France.”¹⁷⁹ The National Front, the defender of “true France,” is engaged in a mortal fight against the “anti-France.” As Le

¹⁷⁵ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *La France est de Retour*, *op.cit.*, p.85.

¹⁷⁶ “Discours de Saint-Franc,” *op.cit.*

¹⁷⁷ “M.Le Pen prend M.Chirac comme cible principale,” in *Le Monde*, May 3, 1997.

¹⁷⁸ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Université d’été 1999 du Front National à Orange,” *op.cit.*

¹⁷⁹ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Université d’été du Front National à Annecy,” *op.cit.*

Pen said in a speech, “Only the Front incarnates and carries the national idea in the French political landscape.”¹⁸⁰ “If the National Front has acquired today the political importance that has, it is also because France has returned,” Le Pen wrote in his book symptomatically called *La France est de Retour* (France is Back).¹⁸¹ Included in the side of “anti-France,” the “France of the foreigners,” are all the mainstream political parties that Le Pen derides as Gang or Band of 4 and the entire media establishment. They too know that there is a mortal war going on between them and the National Front, the “national opposition”, the only obstacle to the implementation of their “monstrous” project of killing millenarian France. As stated by Le Pen,

The National Front, who honors itself as being the Party of the French, suffers, like her [France], in its combat for the liberation of our people, from a systematic persecution from those who hold the power ... This persecution is visible in all domain [yet] It needs to end, together with the decadence of the State and the Republic, the persecution of the patriots and the servitude of France and the French ... Enough of the failure, the corruption, the homeland put in danger, enough. The time has come to chase away from power the liars, the corrupt, and the thieves away from power. The time has come for the people to make its voice heard and its will expressed.¹⁸²

Because of its exceptionality as the last and only defender of the nation the National Front has been the victim of a nefarious and relentless campaign from the establishment. In the narrative of the party several episodes epitomize this persecution, such as the 1990 profanation of the Jewish cemetery of Carpentras which was wrongly attributed to the National Front or the mainstream media accusations of Le Pen engaging in practices of torture during the Algeria war and never proven in the courts of law. The establishment of an electoral majority system that hurt the smaller parties is also viewed as part of this persecutory campaign against the National Front and has led to accusations of the French Republic as a “false democracy.” “In my view is not normal that democracy eliminates the political non-conformist families, such as ours,” noted Le Pen in an interview.¹⁸³ For

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *La France est de Retour*, *op.cit*, p.14.

¹⁸² “Discours du Premier-Mai,” in *Le Pen 91 : Analyses et Propositions*, *op.cit*, pp 65-93

¹⁸³ “La Gauche, elle, ne maltraite pas mes électeurs,” in *Paris Match*, May 6, 1995.

him Le Pen referendums are a way of giving true voice to the people and creating a true democracy.¹⁸⁴

In his discourse Le Pen manages to put forward a framework in which the opposites are clearly defined and the options are unambiguous. To highlight even more the differences between the two camps even more Le Pen demonizes the opponents, occasionally physically, but especially morally. Writing about what distinguishes “France” from the “anti-France” Le Pen notes, “The gap is growing between the ruling intelligentsia, amoral and indulgent to all disorders, and the people [who are] fundamentally sane and who are the victims of those disorders.”¹⁸⁵ “Authority is mostly moral,” noted le Pen about his opponent in the presidential elections, “but Chirac is a man with no reputation, a *immodèle*, an anti-example.”¹⁸⁶ The attack on the morality of the opponents is intended to increase the repulsion towards those who serve the interests of a “foreigner France” against the community of patriots.

In this polarized manner the National Front becomes the only possible solution to deal with the dangers faced by the nation. To counterbalance the forecast of the imminent demise of France, Le Pen offers hope. The National Front is the only path towards salvation. As written by Le Pen, “there is still time, there is always time to refuse annihilation and slavery. A surge of French can still reverse the apocalypse.”¹⁸⁷ “Before the end of the century,” stated Le Pen to his supporters, “whether we [France] have carried out the Salvationist burst or we will be taken away by a cataclysm whose guidelines are already in place.”¹⁸⁸ Only the embattled moral community of the “Elect” has in itself the power to turn around the decline of France and put forward a grandiose project of recovery, renaissance and salvation. In the discourse of Le Pen, they are constantly characterized as the last hope of the nation,

¹⁸⁴ See, for example, “Le Pen à La Trinité : Une grande journée entre symboles et espoirs,” *In National-Hebdo*, August 23-29 2001.

¹⁸⁵ “Rendre La Parole au Peuple – par Jean-Marie Le Pen,” *in Le Monde*, June 16 1983.

¹⁸⁶ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Fête de Jeanne d’Arc du 1^{er} Mai 2002,” *op.cit.*

¹⁸⁷ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d’Abord*, *op.cit.*, p.152.

¹⁸⁸ “M.Le Pen maintiendra ses candidates au second tour ‘partout où ce sera possible’,” *in Le Monde*, March 19, 1993.

The National Front, whatever the case, persists in its will of creating, soon, at national level, a pivotal center of resistance to the decline and decadence ...¹⁸⁹; [The National Front is] the shield of France against which crash all of the projectiles emanating from people who are in rivalry with France or who wish to destroy her, to dissolve her, to demean her or to reduce her to slavery¹⁹⁰; That explains, undoubtedly, ladies and gentleman, the hatred that follows the National Front, its militants and officials, because they constitute in truth the only bolt that allows the nation to remain and, tomorrow, to prosper to the detriment of the cosmopolitan interests.¹⁹¹

The discourse of fear in Le Pen is intimately paired with a discourse of hope and change. The National Front incarnates hope. In fact, he has often concluded his speeches stressing that the National Front has “a rendezvous with Destiny”¹⁹² pleading to the rest of the French population to “join hope.”¹⁹³ To Le Pen, “in the face of the decadent political System [sic] there is only one opposition who can put forward a national politic, the only one capable of assuring the future of France and the French.”¹⁹⁴ The burden of saving France is therefore on the shoulders of the “Elect,” the members of the community under siege, the National Front.

So far I have attempted to illuminate how, through his discourse, Le Pen solidifies the identity of the group as the representatives of France engaged in a mortal fight with the obscure but omnipresent forces of “anti-France.” Le Pen empowers his followers by repeatedly emphasizing their nature as the remnant few Patriots who have the aggrandizing mission of the salvation of France. In the next segment I will try to show how Le Pen manages to portray himself as the guide and savior of the “Elect” in their missionary road to save France. Such a savior is necessary because the danger is so great and the forces of evil are so many and powerful. There has to be a great leader to lead the minority in heroic combat. The way to victory is through moral rectitude and the cowardice of the enemy, who will collapse when confronted resolutely.

¹⁸⁹ “M. Jean-Marie Le Pen : Un môle de résistance au déclin,” in *Le Monde*, June 20, 1989,

¹⁹⁰ “Selon M. Le Pen, la société Française est atteinte du ‘sida mental’,” in *Le Monde*, *op.cit.*

¹⁹¹ “Le Discours de Jean-Marie Le Pen à La Trinité,” in *Présent*, September 2, 1992.

¹⁹² “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Université d’été du Front National à Annecy,” *op.cit.*

¹⁹³ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Fête de Jeanne d’Arc du 1^{er} Mai 2002,” *op.cit.*

¹⁹⁴ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Université d’été du Front National à Annecy,” *op.cit.*

3. Le Pen as the Savior

3.1 The Le Pen Industry

Since the foundation of the National Front in 1972 there has been a persistent trend by the National Front to shift Le Pen's position in the collective consciousness from the level of history onto the level of myth. There has been a relentless effort to mythologize the achievements and life stories of Le Pen in order to imprint the image of the Le Pen as the avatar of Millenarian France deeply upon the minds of his followers. The work of Le Pen's closest collaborators, the central role of the leader in the party-machine, and the discourse of Le Pen himself have fueled this process of mythification of the leader of the National Front -what could be called the "Le Pen industry."

• The Inner Circle

At the very basis of this Le Pen industry is the incessant work of Le Pen's inner circle. They are not merely collaborators; their work could be more logically described as the work of disciples, and sometimes apostles who zealously sanctify the image of their leader. In writings and speeches they describe a sense of destiny about Le Pen. François Brigneau has written that the fact that Le Pen was born in June 20, 1928, at the perfect midpoint between the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II (although it seems to be forgotten that World War II actually started in 1939), proves that Le Pen's birth was no mere coincidence but of a man marked by destiny to play a crucial role of combatant in history.¹⁹⁵ Other friendly biographers have made a similar point.¹⁹⁶ These

¹⁹⁵ "La nouvelle question Le Pen," in *Le Monde*, September 21, 1991.

biographers have also highlighted Le Pen's Celtic roots which seem to only add to the perception of Le Pen as a man of destiny. François Brigneau notes that "There were two fairies around the cradle of Jean-Marie. Two Celtic fairies The first one was the fairy of Eloquence, the second one the fairy of Imagination. It was them who gave the child his most precious gifts, also the most typically Briton."¹⁹⁷ "Le Pen is a Celt, a man [with the gift of] verbal enchantment," writes another commentator, "his hands, his face, his pose become, due to their expressiveness, the mirror of his thoughts."¹⁹⁸ According to Jean Marcilly,

[Le Pen was born] on June 20, that is, the day of the summer solstice, the most important celebration of the Celts, his ancestors, of whom we know more and more that they were a people carrying a profound religious sentiment. Bearers of a unique civilization for the time, turbulent, belligerent, conquerors, we can say that the leader of the 'National Front' resembles them.¹⁹⁹

The image of leader of the National Front as a man with a sense of destiny pervades the accounts of those close to him. Bruno Mégret, the one time general delegate of the party, describes his first encounter with Le Pen as a life-changing moment: "I felt springing up inside of me something indefinable, called trust. Was it set off by [Le Pen's] talent of persuasion, by the shrewdness of his analysis, or the strength of his convictions? I still don't know. In any case, a simple certitude had invaded me: This man is one of those who force destiny!"²⁰⁰ Yvan Blot, a former FN member of the European Parliament, argued that Le Pen's trajectory fulfilled a heroic "historical destiny" of rectifying the excesses of the Enlightenment. To Blot, Le Pen "is the man who incarnates the return of the baroque in the French political life. His combat against the cosmopolitans, his [the combat] for the French soul against the idolaters of the mind."²⁰¹ Drawing from Blot, Pierre Monnier makes a similar point. To him, "voilà!... Jean-Marie-Le Pen, is the irruption of the baroque in a world anemic, politically paralyzed, neo-classic, narrow, Marxist and decadent ... is the take-off of creative pleasure and freedom

¹⁹⁶ See, for example, Marcilly, Jean, *Le Pen sans bandeau*, Jacques Grancher, Paris, 1984, p.97.

¹⁹⁷ Brigneau, François, "Le Passeur d'eau," in Alain Renault and Patrick Buisson (eds) *L'album Le Pen : images d'un français*, Intervalles, Ecully, 1984, p.8.

¹⁹⁸ "Le Pen à Saddam : 'En vous défendant contre l'agression IS, c'est nous tous que vous défendez,'" in *National-Hebdo*, May 30-June 5, 1996.

¹⁹⁹ Marcilly, Jean, *op.cit*, p.97

²⁰⁰ Mégret, Bruno, *La Flamme : Les voies de la renaissance*, Éditions Robert Lafont, Paris, 1990, pp. 9-10.

²⁰¹ Blot, Yvan, *Baroque et Politique*, Éditions nationales, Paris, 1992, p. 251.

.... The innovators of the baroque, at once wise and restless defy the paralysis of the establishment. The breath of life blows off ideology.”²⁰² Le Pen’s life and achievements are therefore integrated in a grandiose and mythical historical framework.

Another topic permanently stressed by the inner circle of the National Front is the image of Le Pen as a natural leader. The literature of the National Front, for example, makes a point of emphasizing that in the French-Celtic dictionary the French word *Chef* (leader) translates as Pen. “To those who believe in destiny,” one of the photo books in honor of Le Pen proclaims, “Le Pen’s destiny was already planned.”²⁰³ One of his childhood friends wrote: “Le Pen in Breton means head [and], therefore, the leader. Jean-Marie saw himself naturally at the head of all the expeditions organized by us.”²⁰⁴ Biographer Roger Mauge noted how, even early in his life and in school, Le Pen “was the head of the game, the one who takes the lead, who speaks louder, the one who we are driven to admire and follow.”²⁰⁵ One of his fellow soldiers in Indochina remembered that “like everyone I had my confrontations with him and I’ve suffered from rejection after the confrontation: he had become the uncontested leader and inspired strong attachments, with his natural authority of a good leader.”²⁰⁶ His biographer Marcilly wrote that Le Pen has a “permanent behavior of leadership”²⁰⁷ As written by Martin Peltier,

Listen to [Le Pen] talk about Rwanda, about the affair Carlos, all kind of affairs, he has a clear and coherent language that slices through the silence of some or the weak and embarrassed explanations of others ... Briefly, Le Pen has the language of a leader. As indicated by his name: Le Pen, the leader. The French people ... need a leader. A real one. A look that discerns, a voice that speaks, a hand that holds ... Our Republic today is a woman without a head. That is why the French suffer, that is why they desert the traditional parties, that is why they need Le Pen.²⁰⁸

The emphasis on Le Pen’s natural leadership qualities is coupled with the intense portrayal of Le Pen as a unique man. In the preface to a photo book dedicated to Le Pen,

²⁰² Monnier, Pierre, *Le Pen, Le Peuple et la Petite Fille Espérance*, Éditions nationales, Paris, 1994, p.130.

²⁰³ Maréchal, Yann and Nicolas Gauthier, *Le Pen, Une Vie Française*, Editions Objectif France, Paris, 2001, p.8.

²⁰⁴ Jégo, Jean-Paul, “Le Pen, c’est Cambronne,” in *L’album Le Pen : Une vie française*, *op.cit*, p.15.

²⁰⁵ Mauge, Roger, *La Vérité sur Jean-Marie Le Pen*, Paris, Éditions France-Empire, 1988, p.41.

²⁰⁶ Peyrat, Jacques, “Contre les Viêts, contre l’ennemi,” in *L’album Le Pen : Une vie française*, *op.cit*, pp.26-27.

²⁰⁷ Marcilly, Jean, *op.cit*, p.21.

²⁰⁸ Peltier, Martin, “Un Chef Nécessaire,” *National Hebdo*, 25-31 August, 1994.

long time Le Pen loyalist Roger Holeindre writes that “this album is a symbol, a homage to and exceptional man, a herald of the homeland: Jean-Marie Le Pen.”²⁰⁹ In fact, in the eyes of his closest collaborators Le Pen is a man of rare qualities. His eloquence is praised. In the words of François Brigneau,

Brother of the great Irish orators, of whom he has the power of evocation, the inspiration, the generosity, the gift of the images and magical rhythms, [Le Pen] does not speak only to please. He speaks to achieve, to teach, to learn, to bring a little of his knowledge, as much as his intuitions and convictions that follow [from his knowledge] that is why he entered politics To transmit verbally the secrets of tradition, without which the genius of a community is swept away by the wind of history ... he excels himself and reveals himself as one of the last natural orators of the epoch.²¹⁰

A party biography praises Le Pen’s performances in the tribune as being “of a rare charisma.”²¹¹ One of his biographers states that “Le Pen is probably the last French *tribun*. He is an accomplished orator, speaking as much as with the heart as with the head, due to the fact that he has something to say and something in his guts that help in the delivery.”²¹² “We know that from all the politicians,” writes Pierre Monnier, “he is the one who handles the French language the best, the one who expresses himself with the most ease and who’s never short of words even if he has embarked in one of his meanderings *à la* Proust.” His ability to deliver unscripted speeches is also praised by Monnier who notes that “we also know that he can occupy the stage for two hours without the help of notes.”²¹³ The last of the great orators is therefore at the service of France.

Le Pen’s perseverance occupies a central place in the exaltation of his rare qualities. The fact that his father’s boat was named *Perseverance* is noted in all of the biographies or books honoring Le Pen.²¹⁴ He is unrelentingly described as a man with a steady persistence in adhering to a course of action and to his ideals, and he is noted for showing an uncommon steadfastness in the face of so many obstacles. As stated by Mégret,

²⁰⁹ *Le Pen, Une Vie Française, op.cit*, p.5.

²¹⁰ Brigneau, François, *op.cit*, p.10.

²¹¹ Bariller, Damien and Franck Timmermans, *op.cit*, p.20.

²¹² Marcilly, Jean, *op.cit*, p.147.

²¹³ Monnier, Pierre, *op.cit*, p.65.

There you have a man [Le Pen] who has remained faithful to his ideas all of his life. He could have had a more peaceful and interesting life outside politics. Nevertheless he has pursued, against winds and tides, a combat that for the moment has only gave him insults and slander. Isn't there a sign that he is driven by an ideal and that he possesses those two qualities, so rare today, that are conviction and courage?²¹⁵

Pierre Monnier makes a similar point:

In a world where everyone looks over his shoulder, [and is] is afraid of taking a step without guaranties He advances, he fights, sturdy and indifferent to all hostility around him Ten years have passed during which he has fought, without success, but confident of achieving what others have always thought impossible.²¹⁶

"We cannot deny," writes François Brigneau, "[Le Pen's] courage, his political straightness, his perseverance, his refusal of all politicking compromises."²¹⁷ If there is a dominant theme in the literature of the National Front dedicated to Le Pen it is that of his perseverance. In one of the photo books dedicated to Le Pen, in the chapter significantly headlined "Tenacity," is written that "obstinate, Jean-Marie Le Pen holds the bar firmly and, despite the difficulties, he remains faithful to his ideas."²¹⁸ Blot writes that Le Pen's perseverance is closely linked with his sense of mission. As he notes in an article,

Jean-Marie Le Pen has the conviction that he has a message to deliver to the French so that France can remain France. Twenty years ago he knew that his message would not have had hardly any echo but still he continued to act because he felt that was his duty, his mission in this land. 'Do what you have to, no matter what happens!' It is the motto of an ethic that is as old as the Iliad of Homer which has 2800 years. It is the ethic of honor, based more on the sentiment of duty than the avidity of power.²¹⁹

Le Pen is many times described as a "Menhir," which not only connects him to prehistoric Celtic origins but also conveys the perception of someone who does not give away to pressure or persuasion. In the work of those close to him Le Pen is a man of unyielding character. Pierre Monnier says that his character is of "a granitic nature."²²⁰ In

²¹⁴ See, for example, Mauge, Roger, *op.cit.*, p.19.

²¹⁵ Mégret, Bruno, *op.cit.*, p.151.

²¹⁶ Monnier, Pierre, *op.cit.*, p.165.

²¹⁷ Brigneau, François, *L'Haine Anti-Le Pen*, Publications FB, Paris, 1992, p.37.

²¹⁸ *L'album Le Pen: images d'un français*, *op.cit.* p.84-85

²¹⁹ Yvan Blot, "Jean-Marie Le Pen, Bruno Mégret : Ils n'ont pas la même vision du monde," in *National-Hebdo*, 8-14 March, 1999.

²²⁰ Monnier, Pierre, *op.cit.*, p.95.

anticipation of the presidential elections of 2002, the National Front published a book in praise of Le Pen that stated that,

For the fourth time, Jean-Marie Le Pen aims at reaching the supreme magistrature. His political career is outside the norms. Never before has a public man been as slandered as he has. Nevertheless he kept firm, against winds and storms, with his convictions and ideals fixed in his heart. The menhirs cannot be knocked down. See you in 2002.²²¹

In order to further highlight the distinction between Le Pen and all of his opponents Le Pen is constantly portrayed as an “honest man.” As stated by Marcilly, “The morality of the political action of Jean-Marie Le Pen is the reason why he prefers taking the risk of being unpopular in order to defend what he sees as the truth, informing his fellow citizens in spite of everything. It is his honor.”²²² Eric Domard, journalist of the *Les Français d'Abord*, takes the point further saying that, in Le Pen, we find “the constant refusal of the *langue de bois* [officialese], the search to speak the truth, denounced by his adversaries as politically incorrect, which has the merit of saying out loud what the militants and the voters think.” He added, “It is this anti-conformism, this temerity of language that cements the strong relationship between the president of the National Front and the militants.”²²³ Yvan Blot draws a stark contrast between the archetype of the “honest man” personified by Le Pen and the archetype of the *Énarque*, the mainstream politician groomed at an elite school such as the *École Nationale d'Administration*. The *Énarques* are denounced as an inbred political caste, connected by privilege. They are characterized by laicization, technocracy, aloofness, and the doctrine of the “politically correct”, bent on imposing their vision of society on the rest of the population. Le Pen is different. In the words of Yvan Blot,

In face of the sclerosis of the dominant neo-classicism that transforms the thought and the action of our political class into a technocratic attitude to the detriment of the aspirations of the French people, Le Pen reintroduces the baroque in French political life. He incarnates its cultural type, that of the ‘honest man’. Everyone who knows Jean-Marie Le Pen knows of his love for the truth. That love for the truth characterized also the baroque century ... the *énarque* prefers Descartes to Pascal. He prefers certitude to the truth. He is much more at ease dealing with clear and distinct ideas than in facing the unstable and contradictory reality.²²⁴

²²¹ *Le Pen, Une Vie Française, op.cit*, p.168.

²²² Marcilly, Jean, *op.cit*, p.169.

²²³ Eric Domard, Journalist of *Français d'Abord*, Interview to the author, May 25, 2004.

²²⁴ Blot, Yvan, *op.cit*, p.248.

Along with Le Pen's honesty, his loyalty in all realms of life, from politics to his personal life is emphasized. The depiction of this loyal side of Le Pen pervades not only his biographies but the entire literature of the National Front. "Every time Le Pen talks about France," writes National-Hebdo director Yves Daoudal,

About the past of France, of the future of France, he emerges as the one who passes the baton of the French civilization, as the holder of the flame, that French flame that comes from faraway [and] which we do not have the right to let fade. His first ambition, regardless of his own personal destiny, is to remain faithful to this duty.²²⁵

Le Pen is depicted as someone who remained loyal to all of those who lived in overseas territories, such as in Algeria or New Caledonia, and wanted to remain part of France.²²⁶ It also stresses his unwavering loyalty and recognition to all of his friends and-or National Front members who either died or were the target of persecutions and aggression. The photo books of the party show Le Pen in the company of those who were persecuted giving them comfort.²²⁷ A widespread image is that of Le Pen with a bandeau on his eye after campaigning for a friend. Although it is a controversial episode,²²⁸ the literature of the National Front notes that "in campaigning for his [Algerian] friend Ahmed Djebbour, Le Pen lost an eye."²²⁹

Besides the depiction of someone committed to ideas and friends Le Pen is also portrayed as a family man. Photos abound of Le Pen with his wife, three daughters and his grandchildren. However his devotion to his cause disrupted his private life and the fact that his wife left him for another man (and former biographer) is viewed as a consequence of the all consuming mission of someone who "didn't have a minute for himself to organize his personal life."²³⁰ As told by Yann Le Pen to one of her father's biographers, "My dad, because of politics, has lost a lot of money, an eye, his health, his family life, and now his wife."²³¹ Le Pen re-married and continued to be portrayed as

²²⁵ Daoudal, Yves, *La Face Cachée de Le Pen*, Paris, Editions Godefroy de Bouillon, 2002, p.21.

²²⁶ See, for example *Le Pen: Une Vie française*, *op.cit.*, pages 44 -53 and 86-89.

²²⁷ See, for example *Le Pen : images d'un Français*, *op.cit.*, p.62.

²²⁸ On this point see, Bresson, Gilles and Christian Lionet, *Le Pen: Biographie*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1994, pp.179-182.

²²⁹ *Le Pen: images d'un Français*, *op.cit.*, pp.68-69.

²³⁰ Mauge, Roger, *op.cit.*, p.236.

²³¹ *Ibid.* p.227.

someone who, despite all, is committed to what is called by the literature of the National Front as his “clan.”²³²

Clairvoyance is another of the rare qualities possessed by Le Pen. His collaborators and friends emphasize the fact that Le Pen has the gift of prediction. According to François Brigneau, Le Pen,

Saw correctly, before everyone else, about the essential problems of immigration, education, natality, families, security, national security, relationship with the Muslim world etc. He saw correctly due to his lucidity but also due to the guiding principle of his action: France and the French in the first place.²³³

A volume dedicated to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the National Front emphasized how Le Pen was right about a variety of themes from immigration to the propagation of aids.²³⁴ Pierre Monnier praised Le Pen’s “anticipating clairvoyance.”²³⁵ Roger Holeindre calls Le Pen a “visionary,” because “in the name of the people he tells the truths, [truths] that sometimes are misunderstood, but without which every hope is vain.”²³⁶ Dominique Martin expresses a similar opinion: “[Le Pen] is in politics for more than fifty years and has demonstrated that he is a visionary. Everything he has announced has materialized and, many times, his solutions are taken by his political adversaries, although in a different fashion.”²³⁷ Marine Le Pen noted that her father “has been the only one who has predicted the problems that we face today. To govern is to predict, he has predicted: the time has come for him to govern.”²³⁸ The image of Le Pen as a leader who is always right ahead of time is present throughout the discourse of his inner-circle.

Above all, the imagery relentlessly promoted by the National Front portrays Le Pen as a true patriot. This literature translates Le Pen’s life experience, from the military to political action, into the image of Le Pen as the embodiment and incarnation of millenarian France. Le Pen’s life has lent itself to this process of mythification; he is, in

²³² *Le Pen: images d'un français*, *op.cit.*, p.139.

²³³ Brigneau, François, “Le journal d’un Homme Libre,” in *Nacional Hebdo*, n. 530, 15-21 September 1994.

²³⁴ *20 Ans Au Front: L’histoire Vraie du Front National*, *op.cit.*, p. 15, 150.

²³⁵ Monnier, Pierre, *op.cit.*, p.114.

²³⁶ *Le Pen: Une Vie Française*, *op.cit.*, p.5.

²³⁷ Dominique Martin, President Group FN, Haute-Savoie region, interview to the author, July 20, 2004.

²³⁸ “D’un parti d’opposition à un parti de gouvernement,” *Français d’Abord, Quotidien*, March 4, 2004.

the words of Pierre Duran, “a show of examples, a gathering of French virtues.”²³⁹ Le Pen encompasses in himself and in his life the best that France’s history, culture and character has to offer: “[He is] a Frenchman that comes from faraway in time, nurtured by Greco-Roman and human wisdom,” asserts Monnier. “This Briton carries with him everything that is specific to our people ... ethics and culture.”²⁴⁰ The following words of Yves Daoudal, shed a light in this myth-ridden patriotic image of Le Pen. He wrote,

Jean-Marie Le Pen is not a Party man, and that is undoubtedly why career politicians reject him. He is the spokesman for France. That is, of France gathered in all its history, in all its components, in all its generations. He assumes all the heritage [of France], that of the saints and scientists, peasants and workers, heroes and soldiers, that of the monarchy and of the republic, the victories and defeats, the shadows and the lights, in one big movement that carries the pearls and the scoria of history ... No other politician underlines [like him] that our role is to collect respectfully what was given to us, to transmit what we have received, and make our heritage bear fruit ... that is the true ‘national’ dimension of Jean-Marie Le Pen. [That is] his historical dimension.²⁴¹

Le Pen is the quintessential Frenchman. He is the *rassembleur*, the man who combines in himself the spirit and history of eternal France. Because of his patriotic credentials, he is the only one who can lead the remnant patriots of France to achieve a grandiose mission of recovery and renaissance. It is not surprising that the General Secretary of the National Front, Carl Lang, sees in Le Pen “the only man who incarnates the hope of renaissance.”²⁴² The literature of the National Front, particularly in the regular production of photo books in which Le Pen is the main character, depicts a man who from the very beginning has made great sacrifices in order to serve his nation, first in the military and then in politics. The attempts on his life and the overall hostility he has faced²⁴³ have only added to the picture of a man who has remained faithful to his principles and committed to serving the nation. The way Le Pen has overcome adversity, many times “alone against everybody”²⁴⁴, and has been able to stay the course and develop a national movement, has enhanced in the eyes of his followers his status as a

²³⁹ Duran, Pierre “Au décochez-moi ça, 1978” in *Le Pen : images d’un français*, op.cit, p.1.

²⁴⁰ Monnier, Pierre, op.cit, p.184.

²⁴¹ Daoudal, Yves, “La France pour seul parti,” in *Le Pen : une vie française*, op.cit, p.60.

²⁴² “La Parade du Chef,” in *Le Monde*, March 3, 1990.

²⁴³ See, for example, *L’album Le Pen: images d’un Français*. Op.cit, pp 92-99

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.100.

hero. In the collective conscience of the National Front the life of Le Pen symbolizes the triumph of commitment and vision over inhospitable conditions. Le Pen has become a myth, a living symbol of potency and hope in the renaissance of France.

In this context it is not surprising that in the mind of those who at same point or another were his closest disciples or collaborators, Le Pen has acquired a quasi-supernatural dimension. Louis Aliot has stated that the continuing strength of the National Front comes from “the providential-like meeting between a man who speaks clear and knows how to point the way and the patriot electorate in love with justice and truth.”²⁴⁵ The National Front published a book called “Passionately French: The Life of Jean-Marie Le Pen in Cartoon Strips” describing the rise of the “superhero” Le Pen from his humble origins to the status of messianic leader. In it, the authors noted that “his life has the taste of the essential, the flavor of the emotion, the force of the ideal.”²⁴⁶ The headline of one of the issues of *National-Hebdo* was: “Clovis - Jeanne d’Arc - Le Pen, the same combat!”²⁴⁷ Louis Aliot has stated that the continuing strength of the National Front comes from “the providential-like meeting between a man who speaks clear and knows how to point the way and the patriot electorate in love with justice and truth.”²⁴⁸ François Brigneau described Le Pen as an “inspired prophet,” comparing him to the heroes of the Flemish poet Verhaeren.²⁴⁹ Bruno Mégret put Le Pen in the category of the “Great Man” of history: “they [great men] position themselves always outside the norms, because, as history teaches us, nothing great can come from respect of conformism. Is our society so low in its decline that it is not capable of admitting [that Le Pen is a great man]?”²⁵⁰ Patrick Binder sees at the core of the “very strong” relationship between Le Pen and the militants “the exceptional charisma of the President of the National Front, seen by everybody, justly, as one of the greatest French politicians of the century.”²⁵¹

²⁴⁵ “Le Billet de Louis Aliot: Le Front National, Une Exception Française,” in *National-Hebdo*, August 26, September 1, 2004.

²⁴⁶ Frank, Bariller., D. Lefort and F. Marest, “Français Passionnément: La Vie de Jean-Marie Le Pen en Bande-Dessinée,” Paris, Éditions Nationales, 1995, p.3.

²⁴⁷ “1er Mai, Clovis – Jeanne d’Arc – Le Pen the same combat!” in *National-Hebdo*, April 18-24, 1996.

²⁴⁸ “Le Billet de Louis Aliot: Le Front National, Une Exception Française,” in *National-Hebdo*, August 26, September 1, 2004.

²⁴⁹ Brigneau, François, “Le passeur d’eau,” *op.cit*, p.10

²⁵⁰ Mégret, Bruno, *op.cit*, p.151.

²⁵¹ Patrick Binder, President of the Group FN in the Alsace region, interview to the author, July 2, 2004.

Yvan Blot wrote about Le Pen's "refusal of resignation, of a heroical type."²⁵² Roger Holeindre, reminiscing about Le Pen's life-episodes, declares that "I believe ... that it was necessary for this man [to have] a supernatural, almost divine, strength of character, for him not to abandon his combat."²⁵³ In the literature of the National Front Le Pen emerges as a providential man who, in a time of crisis, has the mission of saving France. The following description of the context in which the leader of the National Front emerged, found in a book addressed to the militancy of the party, testifies of this deep-rooted belief.

Never has the world been more dangerous. Never has the future been more unpredictable. And, yet, never have the men who have the honor of being at the head of our country have appeared less confident of themselves. It is like if, in the face of the enormous and a little scary challenges of this end of the 20th century, their only answers are uncertainties. The reason for this arises from the fact that they don't know anymore who they govern for. And, when they know it, they don't dare say it anymore. In the face of adversity, the only recourse is the will to fight. But this historical will must be rooted in faith. In these times of feeble values and tottered convictions Jean-Marie LE PEN [sic] is a man of faith. For him, decline is not ineluctable.²⁵⁴

Le Pen is, therefore, the charismatic missionizing hero with all of the rare qualities necessary to save France.

• The Leader's Discourse

Le Pen himself plays a prominent role in the development of the "Le Pen industry." In his discourse Le Pen puts forward a framework that accentuates on one hand the urgent need for a true leader who can fight decadence and lead a national renaissance and on the other hand his own role and attributes as "the right man" for the mission. Le Pen is outspoken about the need for a strong leadership. "The French, when they are helped by great ideas and true leaders," he writes, "either in the domain of enterprise or

²⁵² Blot, Yvan, *op.cit*, and p.225.

²⁵³ *Le Pen: Une vie française, op.cit*, p.5.

²⁵⁴ *Militer au Front*, Institut de Formation Nationale, Editions Nationales, Paris, 1991, p.21.

the army, [they] go further than the entire world.”²⁵⁵ In an interview he warned about a widespread decadence that cried out for leadership, “[a] crisis both moral and spiritual that our country knows,” that demanded a strong resolve from the nation, “Without which there will be no recovery and renaissance.” He continued by affirming that “I deeply believe that many French have hope in new formations and hope in new men.”²⁵⁶ In fact, Le Pen persistently promotes a “Great Man” interpretation of history. In his words,

All the peoples who have let themselves slip and became soft, either because of materialism or the abandon of the great principles of collective and individual virtues, have been swept away by the barbarians. We believe that what lifts the peoples, what allows them to live, are the saints, the heroes, the martyrs. We do not say that we are saints, or heroes or martyrs, but we say that the peoples need them as they need poets and artists.²⁵⁷

The fact is that in his discourse Le Pen sometimes implicitly, other times openly makes himself a member of the “Great Man” club of history. He is able to insert himself in to a long tradition of historical heroes. At the time of the internal dissent led by Bruno Mégret, Le Pen made the following analogy:

I was told: Is there any possibility of reaching an agreement? Any chance of putting water in the fire, or that Cesar issues a pardon? ... The difference between Cesar and me is that when Brutus approaches Cesar holding the knife in his hand, it is me who pulls the sword and kill Brutus before he kills me!²⁵⁸

Le Pen makes an effort to infuse a mythic character into his public persona. Explaining the “charismatic nature” of his persona, Le Pen mentions a “magical” dimension.

We only transmit what we have [charisma]. Thus, to spread one’s faith or ideal, it is necessary a strong belief and its vigorous defense. It is this faith in action that attracts and creates what we called the phenomenon of charisma. [This charisma] may be heightened by qualities of expression, however a good orator is not necessarily charismatic ... I Think there is something magic in the will of persuasion of a man. There are people who have a magnetic radiance and

²⁵⁵ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d’Abord*, *op.cit*, p.25.

²⁵⁶ “L’heure de vérité du 13 Février 1984,” in *Les Français d’Abord*, *op.cit*, p.211.

²⁵⁷ “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Le Front National,” in Jean-Pierre Apparu (ed), *La Droite aujourd’hui*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1979, p.180.

²⁵⁸ *Le Monde*, “A Metz, devant les militants, Jean-Marie Le Pen assure qu’il sera sans pitié pour les ‘félons’,” 14-15 December, 1998.

[there are] also publics of strong conductivity. When there is a match between the message transmitted and the aspirations of the masses, there is abruptly synergy. Yet nothing can be transmitted without emotion, this synergy resembles love.²⁵⁹

He has repeatedly defined himself as the “Robin Hood who takes from the rich,” and the “Zorro of the poor and of the French.”²⁶⁰ Asked about what would be the National Front without him Le Pen answered: “What would have been *gaullisme* without De Gaule, the empire without Bonaparte, communism without Lenine? Probably very little. At the beginning of all great human enterprises there is always a man and an idea that unite and give impetus.”²⁶¹ He concluded his 1990 speech at the National Front congress in Nice with the legendary words of the General La Rochejaquelein during the revolutionary period in France: “If I advance, follow me; if I die, avenge me; If I retreat, kill me!”²⁶² The perspective of losing elections does not bother him. After all, “before becoming the president of the United States, Lincoln was defeated forty times.”²⁶³ Even the fact that Le Pen has named his private boat “General Cambronne,” a “detail” pointed out many times in the literature of the National Front, adds to shaping the perception of Le Pen as a legendary figure. After all, General Cambronne led the Old Guard in the battle of Waterloo and, when asked to surrender, his last words became etched forever in the popular imaginary, “The Guard dies, it does not surrender!”²⁶⁴ Le Pen does not miss an occasion to remind the National Front that “in our march we have the company, invisible but present, of the Saints, the Martyrs, the Heroes of our long History ...”²⁶⁵

Le Pen’s emphasis on heroes of the past such as Joan of Arc and on the similarities between her time and the present only helps the listener to reach the natural conclusion of what is being implied: In the same way that she led France in fighting off the decadence of the past, Le Pen will lead France in fighting off the decadence of the present. In the words of Le Pen, “She [Joan of Arc] shows us the road of courage and

²⁵⁹ Le Pen, Jean-Marie “Les moments forts de la vie de Jean-Marie Le Pen,” in Frank, Bariller, D. Lefort and F. Marest, *op.cit.*, p.6.

²⁶⁰ *Le Monde*, June 9 1984.

²⁶¹ “Polémique : droit de réponse à Jean-Marie Le Pen,” in *Le Figaro-Magazine*, February 17, 1990.

²⁶² “La parade du chef,” *op.cit.*, April, 3 1990.

²⁶³ “Lançant sa campagne, M. Le Pen assure qu’il serait ‘heureux de gagner mais pas désespéré de perdre,” in *Le Monde*, September 20, 2003.

²⁶⁴ See, for example, *Le Pen, Une vie française*, *op.cit.*, p.132-138.

²⁶⁵ “Fête de Jeanne d’Arc du 1er Mai 2002,” *op.cit.*

faith. She teaches us that nothing is lost when we have the courage, a pure heart and tenacity.”²⁶⁶ This comparison between himself and Joan of Arc is always present in the discourse of Le Pen.

Le Pen puts forward a biographical account stressing that he, like the heroes of the past, personifies all of the necessary qualities of the leader that France dramatically needs. Le Pen not only charges himself with the task of being the spokesperson for the people but also identifies himself with someone who comes from the people. As he noted in an interview, “I think that [France] trusts men like me, who do not have to bend in order to reach the people, but who come from the people to express its aspirations, hopes and maybe to build with her [France] a future of freedom and hope.”²⁶⁷ In the preface to one of the photo books dedicated to his life story Le Pen emphasizes his common touch:

The images gathered here, could have been those of your personal album ... They are those of a Frenchman like you, proud of his homeland, of his people, his kith and kin ... anyone can find here a reflection of things of his or her life, of life: the family, the childhood, the mothers, the women and girls, friends, school, army, work and the face of those who do not live anymore but in our hearts. A simple story, in short.

He repeats the same point in the preface to another book. Writing about his life story he states, “This story is a simple story, in short. [It is] a French story that, although it is mine, could have been perfectly well yours also.”²⁶⁸ In his discourse Le Pen frequently mentions his family lineage of peasants and fisherman. Le Pen repeatedly states that he comes from an unprivileged upbringing. Reminiscing about his childhood, he wrote, “We were poor, but happy. The love of the family was the surrogate for comfort.”²⁶⁹ As he said in a speech to the militants, “I am a man of the people ... born in a two-room apartment with no running water, my grand-parents didn’t know how to read or write.”²⁷⁰ By stressing his unprivileged background Le Pen not only underlines his similarity with the people but also sends a message that he, unlike the privileged elitists mainstream politicians, can relate to the hardships of the people. This is a common line of Le Pen’s attack. He assails the technocrats for being out of touch with the people: “They

²⁶⁶ “Entendez Le Chant du Peuple Français, par Jean-Marie Le Pen,” *Présent*, September 5 1996.

²⁶⁷ “L’heure de vérité du 13 Février 1984,” in Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d’Abord*, *op.cit*, p.246.

²⁶⁸ Le Pen, *Une vie française*, *op.cit*, p.7.

²⁶⁹ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d’Abord*, *op.cit*, p.32.

cannot imagine what happens to one who is unemployed, they have never imagined and they never will ... they believe that the fishing industry and agriculture do not deserve to exist because they despise hard jobs.” Further, “They are afraid of making their hands dirty but it’s not the land that is dirty, it is corruption.”²⁷¹ In a speech to his militants, Le Pen declared, “I was poor, I suffered from cold and hunger. And the poor, those who have known cold and hunger ... the lonely, the desperate, will always have a privileged place in my heart.”²⁷² In an interview from the 1980s, he declared: “I am one of the rare political man who earns his life in an ordinary way, that is, to earn my life I have founded a record label.”²⁷³

To further legitimize himself with the people, Le Pen underscores his unselfish attitude towards politics. This is particularly important in an era where the mainstream political class has been hit hard by corruption, one of the “two taboos of the French political life, together with immigration”²⁷⁴ according to Le Pen. “I’m not like one of those who want power for the sake of power,” he said in one occasion.²⁷⁵ He wrote that “I’m in politics not to ‘make money’ but to defend and advance my ideas. That’s what I ask from life _ and that’s what life has given me _ to live honorably and to give good conditions to my kith and kin.”²⁷⁶ “I have a tendency,” he noted “to imagine the people as I am: that is, straight, loyal, honest and genuine.”²⁷⁷

In fact Le Pen constantly evokes a homespun persona and carefully conveys an image of frugality although, after becoming the heir of a personal fortune of a friend, he lives very comfortably in the rich Paris suburb of Saint Cloud. However, “I don’t have any [expensive] passions, I don’t have a yacht or a sports car ... I live my life in simplicity, as often as possible with my family ... but I would be happy as well as long as I was surrounded by books, in a small room I don’t have a lot of needs.”²⁷⁸ To further his identification with the people, Le Pen plays up the image of a traditional family man

²⁷⁰ “A Metz ...,” in *Le Monde*, *op.cit*

²⁷¹ “Jean-Marie Le Pen s’en prend à Jacques Chirac,” in *Le Monde*, March 14, 1995.

²⁷² “Le Discours Présidentiel en Détail,” in *National Hebdo*, 22-28 September 1994.

²⁷³ “L’Heure de vérité du 13 Février 1984,” *op.cit*, p.217.

²⁷⁴ *Les Français d’Abord! Quotidien*, February 7, 2004.

²⁷⁵ “La gauche, elle, ne maltraite pas mes électeurs,” in *Paris-Match*, May 6, 1995.

²⁷⁶ Marcilly, Jean, *op.cit*, p.30.

²⁷⁷ Habbad, Said, “Le Pen, sujet et objet de discours,” Université Lumière Lyon II, doctoral thesis (not published), p.126.

²⁷⁸ “Le Pen – Le droit de savoir, sur TF1,” in *Ibid*, p.131.

in speeches. Photos capture him in the midst of everyday life with his wife, granddaughters and grandchildren. Such imagery helps people to identify with Le Pen, who enjoys the same pleasures as any ordinary man and contrasts him with the more reserved approach regarding family matters of typical French politicians.

In fact, images of his family have always been at the center of Le Pen's discourse. His ordinariness plays a pivotal part in Le Pen's strategy of saying what seems self-evident. He foments his reputation as someone "who tells it like it is," and his arguments are usually presented as obvious facts. "I express," he writes "I think, ideas of common sense."²⁷⁹ As noted in *Le Pen Les Mots*, this strategy "links the speech to an absolute knowledge, accepted by everyone, always true, that cannot be contradicted without challenging the most elementary good sense, the common sense, the knowledge ordinarily shared."²⁸⁰ A typical example of what Le Pen calls "hierarchical affinities and attachments"²⁸¹ comes from the way chooses to justify his policy of national preference. The following excerpt is repeated over and over again:

The beautiful spirits and souls of Paris [political class] refer to the politics that we defend as selfish, xenophobic and racist. It is nothing like that. In fact, what we do is to apply in politics what is the most elementary rule of good sense, that is, to apply our duties first to oneself and then to those close to us. I've said this many times: I love my daughters more than my nieces, my nieces more than my cousins, my cousins more than my neighbors. It's the same in politics; I love the French the most. And no one will make me say something different.²⁸²

"However," said Le Pen in an interview, "that doesn't mean that we detest our neighbors. The fact of being Francophile doesn't required being xenophobic. The fact that I prefer the French does not mean that I detest the English. I like them less than the French – *overall*."²⁸³ Le Pen prides himself in speaking a language that is at odds with the perceived politically correct and "sensitive" language of mainstream politicians and media. According to him this pervasive political correctness is a way of avoiding the real issues and problems faced by France, from immigration, insecurity, loss of national independence and erosion of values. Le Pen sees himself as a "free man." According to

²⁷⁹ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d'Abord*, op.cit, p.173.

²⁸⁰ Souchard, Maryse, S. Wahnich, I. Cuminal and V. Wathier, *Le Pen Les Mots : analyse d'un discours d'extreme droite*, Editions Le Monde, Paris, 1998, p.22.

²⁸¹ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *L'Espoir*, p.102.

²⁸² Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *La France est de retour*, op.cit, p.170

him, “politicians speak a stereotyped language – not me! – because they fear the censorship of the media ... they are afraid ‘to slip’ [to say something offensive], to say something outside of the normative system defined by the media.”²⁸⁴

The choice of words at the beginning of his statements is intended to further Le Pen’s dimension of someone who is in touch with the most elementary common sense: “It’s clear that,” “We all know that,” “As you have already figured out,” “We know very well,” “The truth is,” “The people knows very well,” etc.²⁸⁵ To bolster his credibility as a common man, Le Pen sometimes uses a very crude and vivid language. “France,” he said in one occasion, “has been sold to the left by conservatives who are [acting like] an old lady who, on the verge of being raped, folds up her skirt and blouse, to see if at least she can save her own clothes.” He concluded by saying, “France is not a brothel to six million of immigrants.”²⁸⁶ At a debate Le Pen asserted, “the day we have in France not five but twenty-five million of Muslims, they will be the ones in command ... and the French will have to keep their eyes down. If they don’t do it they will be told, “are you looking at me? Are you looking for a fight? And all you have to do is to behave otherwise you will be beaten up. That is why the National Front finds a lot of support in the popular neighborhoods.”²⁸⁷ Le Pen is also known for telling jokes to his audience, reciting poems from such authors as Verhaeren, Péguy or Brasillach, and regularly singing local, regional or popular songs from such performers as Yves Montand and Edith Piaf, for example.²⁸⁸ This creates intimacy and further accentuates his image as a popular man.

Le Pen claims he has the credentials to be a true leader for France because he comes from the people and he is, above everyone else, a true patriot. In fact, Le Pen repeatedly highlights his unwavering commitment and loyalty to France since the early days of his childhood. “I was lucky,” remembered Le Pen in a speech, “because my natural instinct of attachment to my land and my region was nurtured from the beginning of my life. Because I belonged to those generations who learned to love the homeland

²⁸³ “Profile,” in *The New Yorker*, April 28, 1997.

²⁸⁴ *Le Figaro-Magazine*, op.cit.

²⁸⁵ Le Pen’s speeches are full of words that depict common sense.

²⁸⁶ “Reunion à Compiègne,” in Plenel, Edwin and Alain Rollat, *L’Effet Le Pen*, Éditions La Découverte, 1984. p.29.

²⁸⁷ *Français d’Abord! Quotidien*, April 30, 2003.

²⁸⁸ See, for example, *Le Pen: Une vie Française*, p.100.

and to pray to God in the arms of our mothers.”²⁸⁹ The fact that, after the death of his father, he was adopted by the State as a “pupil of the nation” is a pivotal reference in the patriotic pedigree Le Pen exalts for himself:

I felt, as a child, a particular emotion in regard to that administrative formula that was issued by the civil courts when your father had died for France: “The nation adopts the minor Jean-Marie Le Pen.” All my life I felt that I had, because of this formula, not two times more rights than the others, but two times the duties. And if I accepted responsibilities in the student world and after in politics, if I decided to volunteer for the army, to go to Indochina ... it is because I had the feeling not only that was at stake the battle against communism ... but also because if France did not receive the support of the youth she would die of sadness and despair because in order to fight it is at least necessary that those whom we fight for are conscious [that we fight for them]²⁹⁰

Le Pen never misses an opportunity to instruct his audience that his life-episodes testify to his patriotism and entitle him to the leadership of the nation. In announcing his candidacy in the 1988 presidential elections, Le Pen returned to *La Trinité-sur-Mér*, the place where he was born, to reaffirm his patriotism.

[C]hild of the people, pupil of the nation, I was raised by my mother in the love of God and country. I myself have devoted my life to my family and homeland, to which I gave my best to serve for more than forty years, under the flag, in my military and political life. It is because I have the profound conviction that the homeland is in grave danger and that the French are threatened with being ruined, submerged, and enslaved that I have decided to engage in this decisive battle for the future of France.²⁹¹

In the run-up for the presidential campaign of 2002 Le Pen wrote about the role of the public man in the contemporary world. It gives a particularly relevant testimony to Le Pen’s use of his biography to bolster his sense of entitlement, as a true patriot, to become the head of the nation.

Only child, alas! Pupil of the nation when I was fourteen years old, I’ve been always in search of that brotherhood that I have lacked, and maybe that is the principal source of my vocation as a public man ... [the public man] makes an effort to act in the general interest of his people and of his nation. [The public man] is a patriot. In any case, it was in this spirit that I have dedicated myself to politics: the most difficult art and the noblest service together with the army ... Adopted by the nation after my father was “killed for France,” I have always felt more

²⁸⁹ “Discours à l’armée – Tourves, 23 novembre,” in *Le Pen 91 : analyses et propositions*, op.cit, p.340.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.342.

²⁹¹ “La Patrie est en grand danger,” in *Le Monde*, April 27, 1987.

responsible [to the nation], more in debt to her than my fellow citizens. When I was a child we did not doubt God since we were Christians, or the homeland because we were French.²⁹²

Le Pen plays therefore a substantial part in the “Le Pen industry” that consolidates his image as the leader necessary, in his words, to “guide [France’s] surge and its renaissance.”²⁹³

• The Personalized Party

The overall structure and dynamics of the National Front as a political party plays an important function too in the strengthening of the process of mythification of the leader. Since Le Pen accepted the leadership of the National Front he has maintained a powerful grip over the party. The party has a centralized power structure based around its president. Every three or four years the National Front holds a Congress. A pool of delegates chosen from regional mini-congresses constitutes the participants. The party congress elects the members for the central committee of the National Front. From these members Le Pen chooses those he wants for the party’s political committee, the *bureau politique* (composed of thirty to fifty members). Finally from these members Le Pen personally chooses those who will be part of the executive committee, the *bureau exécutif*. The party has a defined hierarchical structure that has the president of the party at the top. Le Pen has always justified it as a necessity. To him, “the National Front has always been hierarchized and disciplined because that is a fundamental necessity for its unity, guarantee of its survival and its progress in a milieu that it is very hostile to him.”²⁹⁴ The party’s political committee has a strong hold on the regional expansion of

²⁹² “Sans haine, mais sans crainte, sans remords et sans repentance,” in *Le Pen : Une vie française*, op.cit. p.175-176.

²⁹³ “La Patrie est en grand danger,” in *Le Monde*, op.cit.

²⁹⁴ “Université d’été 2004 du Front National à Enghein,” op.cit.

the party, and there have been cases of local and regional leaders being replaced by Le Pen for displaying too much autonomy.²⁹⁵

The discretionary power of Le Pen was evident, for example, in the congress of Nice in April 2003. Even though his daughter, Marine Le Pen, came in only 34th out of 137 candidates voted by the delegates in the election for the central committee, Le Pen appointed her as vice-president, thereby giving her an automatic seat on the party's executive committee. He dismissed all criticisms or accusations of nepotism as, "some small pitiful upheavals, and some small sourness. Talent always creates some irritations"²⁹⁶ and accused the critics of "confusing their personal interests with the interests of the cause, which is essential."²⁹⁷ Le Pen made sure to let everyone know that he, as always, was in command. He addressed reporters by saying that "the mission of the president of the National Front is to maintain both the unity and dynamism of the movement."²⁹⁸ The executive committee (composed of eight to ten members) is comprised by advisors who discuss the general policies of the movement, but Le Pen is always the one who has the final say. Yann Piat, a former member of the political committee in the eighties described the meetings in the following terms:

Around the table there was supposed to be an exchange of ideas. In reality, apart from the very technical and straightforward reports of Stirbois [former General Delegate] no one dared to discuss, much less criticize ... when Le Pen speaks everyone is silent; when Le Pen decides no one risks murmuring the smallest contradiction. At that time, the Front, the executive committee, was the court of King Jean I."²⁹⁹

The decision process for choosing the president of the National Front parliamentary group is elucidative. Le Pen declared, "I will be a candidate for the presidency. Anyone running against me?" Half of the members laughed. The other half looked down. 'Very well, if no one is a candidate against me, I am therefore elected

²⁹⁵ See, for example, Pedahzur, Ami and Avraham Brichta "The Institutionalization of extreme right wing charismatic parties: a paradox?" *Party Politics*, vol.8 No.1 2002.

²⁹⁶ "Marine Le Pen, reléguée en 34^e position, aux élections internes du FN", *Le Monde*, April 21, 2003

²⁹⁷ "M. Le Pen tempère ses critiques à l'égard des élus du FN qui bravent son autorité," *Le Monde*, May 22, 2004.

²⁹⁸ "Marine Le Pen, reléguée en 34^e position, aux élections internes du FN," in *Le Monde*, April 21, 2003.

²⁹⁹ Piat, Yann, *Seule, Tout en Haut à Droite*, Paris, Éditions Fixot, 1991, p.129.

president unanimously.”³⁰⁰ In every congress, Le Pen, is reelected president of the National Front by acclamation from the delegates.³⁰¹

Under Le Pen’s leadership the FN has had a high level of cohesion, and he does not tolerate any sort of opposition. For Le Pen dissension is potential insurrection or rebellion against his rule. Over the years Le Pen has regularly reminded his troops that he is the leader. As he said in a speech,

We have to remain vigilant ... it is necessary to clearly dissipate all ambiguities. [As] founder and president of the National Front for 25 years ... I will continue to assume the plenitude of my functions that your trust has not ceased to confirm. There is none but, and I say that in friendship and affection, only one number, the number 1, elected unanimously by the congress. Then, I announce that I will be the head of the list for the European Elections [1999]”³⁰²

A similar warning was issued at the end of the 2003 Congress in Nice. The 75-year-old Le Pen made clear that any talk of a successor would be a waste of time since, in perfect health, he was “the only master on board”³⁰³ and “would remain at the head of the party until I’m 95.”³⁰⁴ He has jokingly asked his audiences to start calling him “Jean-Marie Methuselah,” an allusion to the bible patriarch said to have lived 969 years.³⁰⁵ In an interview he announced that he would be the candidate of the National front in the Presidential elections of 2007. “As long,” he added, “as my health lets me.”³⁰⁶ In the spring of 2004, during a period where some FN officials criticized the “lack of debate” inside the party and Le Pen’s choices of candidates for the European Parliament elections, Le Pen reminded again everyone of his supreme authority. He reiterated that “it is up to the president to decide according to the superior interests of the movement, as understood by him.”³⁰⁷ Le Pen’s way of dealing with this internal tension followed a familiar pattern that he has been using since the early moments of the National Front.

In any case if there is a perception that a National Front official has a growing influence within the party Le Pen relegates him or her to the sidelines. The process can be

³⁰⁰ Bresson, Gilles and Christian Lionet, *op.cit.* p. 436.

³⁰¹ See, for example, *Le Monde*, “Le Congrès du Front National,” April, 3 1990,

³⁰² “Discours de Toulon, 1998,” in *Le Monde*, “Le Pen vu par les ‘mégrotistes’” December 12, 1998.

³⁰³ “Pour compenser l’influence de M.Gollnisch,” *Le Monde*, April 22, 2003.

³⁰⁴ “The New Face of France’s Far Right,” *New York Times*, April 27, 2003.

³⁰⁵ “Lançant sa campagne,” *Le Monde*, September 20, 2003.

³⁰⁶ “Interview a l’hebdomadaire VSD,” AFP, March 5, 2004.

slow or fast, but it inevitably ends with a purge from the party. The most famous case is the purge of Mégret at the end of the nineties, but there have been various expulsions in the history of the party. In the mid eighties Le Pen saw Jean-Pierre Stirbois as a potential threat to his rule and a process of marginalization was under way when he died in 1988.³⁰⁸ In order to solidify his primacy in the party, Le Pen has opted for a “divide and rule” philosophy. The political apparatus of the National Front is constituted by two rival structures: the general Delegation that supervises the ideological orientation of the party and the general Secretariat that supervises the local implementation of the party. Many times their tasks collide, and there is not a distinct separation of roles. In this context, Le Pen becomes the arbiter and the one whom everyone looks upon to resolve the rivalries. This only adds to Le Pen’s control over different factions of the National Front.

There is a powerful identification between the National Front and Le Pen. The party literature is oriented towards the promotion of the leader. For some time the newspaper of the movement was called *La Lettre de Jean-Marie Le Pen* (The Letter of Jean-Marie Le Pen). The official party periodical, *Les Français d’Abord!* Is promoted as “the magazine of Jean-Marie Le Pen.” The party has launched video games where Le Pen fights his political opponents.³⁰⁹ In the marketing department militants can buy badges, key rings and even Champagne with photos of Le Pen. In the official website of the National Front cybernauts can listen to the “Radio Le Pen,” audio files that contain, for example, excerpts of his speeches. In the website there is also evidently a strong emphasis on the patriotic biography of Le Pen. Under the headline “A Fervent Patriot,” it is asserted, “Jean-Marie Le Pen is one of those rare contemporary political men who put his life at risk for his homeland and ideas.”³¹⁰ The mythologization of Le Pen is only a click away on the Internet.

The “industry Le Pen” is arguably a collective work that involves the discourse of Le Pen, the work of his inner circle and the solid identification of the political party with the leader. The end result is the mythification of Le Pen, which facilitates his promotion

³⁰⁷ *Français d’Abord*, “Rien de tout cela au Front National,” May 29, 2004.

³⁰⁸ Le Pen’s appointing of Bruno Mégret in 1988 to the post of general Delegate of the party is interpreted as a way of putting an end to Jean-Pierre Stirbois growing influence.

³⁰⁹ See, *National-Hebdo*, February 15-21, 1996.

³¹⁰ www.frontnational.com; www.jeanmarielepen.info

of himself as the embodiment of millenarian France and as the only one who can guide her to salvation.

3.2 Religious Symbolism

• Rhetoric

Le Pen has always denied any supernatural dimension to his persona or to the National Front. Asked about the total devotion that his inner circle expressed for him, sometimes comparing him to a prophet, Le Pen replied: “we live in an State-spectacle ... I have never encouraged that kind of vision, but it is true however that I believe that if people knew me better, they would like me better.”³¹¹ He has always rejected any comparison between his role as the leader of the National Front and that of the prophet leading his people to the Promised Land. In fact he puts his disbelief in terrestrial paradises at the very center of the core difference between a right wing and a left wing ideology.

The Right is modest, the Right says: Regarding men, almost everything is known, almost everything has been thought out and written, and men will remain as they are. The big difference is that the man of the right, when he believes in paradise, he knows that it is not on the earth; the man of the Left, I don't know if he believes it, but he claims that it [the paradise] is on the earth.³¹²

In fact, one of Le Pen's favorite mottos in his assailing of the left was for a long time, “No to paradise! Neither red nor rose.”³¹³ In an interview he noted,

The golden age is a notion of the left. It's a constructivist, Rousseau-istic notion. It's the enlightenment ... I don't believe in earthly paradise. My paradise is in another world. [Happiness] is a personal conception. What it is is that there are conditions of unhappiness Without having

³¹¹ “M.Le Pen (FN): pas de renaissance de l'Europe sans remise en ordre de la France,” in *Le Monde*, June 8, 1984.

³¹² “Jean-Marie Le Pen – Le Front National,” in Apparu, Jean-Pierre, *op.cit*, p.177.

³¹³ See, for example, Le Pen 91, *op.cit*, p.315.

the pretension of creating a happy world, we try to create the conditions of a less unhappy world.³¹⁴

However, as we have seen, the leader of the National Front has always put forward a narrative that has at its center an apocalyptic face-off between the forces of true France and the army of the anti-France. This battle is regularly described by Le Pen as a final confrontation between purity and corruption, light and darkness, good and evil. In his discourse, both verbal and symbolic, Le Pen casts himself as a man who has embarked on a mission to lead the remnant few patriots, the community of the “elect,” into combat against evil in order to redeem and save France. Many times he depicts this confrontation in specific religious terms. According to Le Pen the values that drive the National Front are “simple values,” that is “those [values] that have governed the development of our civilization. They are the basis [of civilization], through the respect of God, the respect of man, the respect of fraternity, they are the rules of the Decalogue that have been imposed on our civilization.”³¹⁵ In his book *Les Français d’Abord* Le Pen, writing about the communist threat, prophesizes that “the first rider of the apocalypse, the one who all the world slowly knows by its name, without daring to affront it with clarity and firmness, is international communism.”³¹⁶ “A surge of French,” he added, “can still stop the apocalypse.”³¹⁷ “International communism,” he said in another occasion, “has given examples of the variety of methods that it is capable of employing in order to reach its supreme and, we can say, satanic, goal: the domination of the world by one religion, by a monstrously inhuman dogma.”³¹⁸

In one revealing statement to his militants, Le Pen declared his “confidence in the instinct of our people, following the example of Saint *Michel*, to combat the demons of renunciation, decline, decadence and servitude.”³¹⁹ In a speech given at the annual National Front tribute to Joan of Arc, Le Pen stated emphatically that,

³¹⁴ “Profile,” *The New Yorker*, April 28, 1997.

³¹⁵ “Discours de Bagatelle,” September 23, 1990 in *Le Pen 90, op.cit.* p.155.

³¹⁶ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d’Abord, op.cit.* p.144.

³¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.152.

³¹⁸ Marcilly, Jean, *op.cit.* p.186.

³¹⁹ “J’appelle la France à combattre le déclin, la décadence et la servitude,” *National Hebdo*, 12-18 November, 1987.

Today we live in an identical [to the time of Joan of Arc] crisis of civilization, with extremely comparable social and sociological consequences regarding the corruption of power, the dissolution of customs, and the preference given to the material over the spiritual. Today the riders of the Apocalypse are called immigration-invasion, the murder of nature and life, the economic and social ruin, the loss of security and the death of public freedoms.³²⁰

As he noted in another meeting with his militants,

The fact that we have faith in her [France], in her destiny, not comparable to any other, is at the basis of our renaissance. Our crusade ... [our reforms] will not be realized, in fact, without fighting adverse powers that came out apparently from hell, what we justly call the 'anti-France.' To those who hesitate it should be remembered the flamboyant expression of Joan [of Arc]: "warriors will fight and God will give the victory." As stated in the holy gospel: "If the Lord does not defend the city, in vain stay up those who guard her."³²¹

To convey an idea of how grave the crisis of France is, in a speech to his militants he said, "The country is, evidently, ladies and gentleman, engaged in a downward spiral that will throw it into the eternal fire."³²² The use of the metaphor of a "descent into hell" is regularly used by Le Pen as a way of describing the deep-rooted crisis of France.³²³ Le Pen constantly uses Biblical metaphors. He repeatedly describes the ideologues of internationalism as worshippers of Moloch, a divinity worshipped by the idolatrous Israelites, and followers of the Golden Calf, an object of worship among the Hebrews.³²⁴ In both cases the implication is of a Jewish plot to dominate world affairs in anticipation of the apocalypse. The European Union, in Le Pen's mindset a crucial component of internationalism, is many times regarded as a "Tower of Babel," that sooner or later will collapse.³²⁵

Le Pen sees an apocalyptic battle going on between the forces of good and the forces of evil. The natural order of the world is being maliciously destroyed and, "between good and evil, the state cannot remain neutral."³²⁶ In a meeting with his

³²⁰ "Discours Du Premier-Mai, 1990," in *Le Pen 90 : Analyses et propositions*, op.cit, p.25.

³²¹ "Fête de Jeanne d'Arc du 1er mai 2000," in www.frontnational.com

³²² "Discours du Bourget BBR, 13 octobre," in *Le Pen 91 : Analyses et propositions*, op.cit, p.307.

³²³ See, for example, "Discours de lancement de la campagne Le Pen PACA 2004," September 18, 2003, in www.frontnational.com

³²⁴ See, for example, "discours de clôture du Congrès du FN à Nice," in www.frontnational.com

³²⁵ See, for example, *Les Français D'Abord – Le Magazine de Jean-Marie Le Pen*, "L'Union Européenne," January 2004.

³²⁶ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d'Abord*, op.cit, p.78.

followers he declared that time had come “to put order in the house, let [those who are] evil tremble and [those who are] good be reassured.”³²⁷

He has prophesized about signs that announce the radicalization of the battle: “We are going to enter an agitated period; without being millenarian, we can perceive the first signs of various confrontations. I can be wrong but I think that at that moment it is better to have a captain who still has strong arms to hold the helm than people with less experience.”³²⁸ Throughout the discourse of Le Pen we find references to the upcoming of dramatic events – characterized by widespread disorder, violence and destruction – that will push France either to annihilation or salvation. The following excerpt of a speech that Le Pen delivered to his militants during one of the traditional meetings in honor of Joan of Arc testifies of his apocalypticism:

The time has not brought yet generalized disorders, although they are getting close, [I hope] at least that the youth start to open their eyes and look beyond the present times to the events that will force their destiny ... Even if they don't know it [the youth] is in the frontline ... only the French people, awakened by the proximity, the imminence of the mortal danger, can, with the best, the most lucid and courageous of their sons engage in the Battle till the victory.³²⁹

In another occasion Le Pen warned about “a torrent of social, political and moral decadence that seems to drive the world towards unknown but already present apocalypses.”³³⁰ The former general delegate Bruno Mégret sees in what he calls the “catastrophism” of Le Pen an “excessive behavior.” As stated by Mégret, “[Le Pen has the] idea that we can only change the situation after the arrival of chaos ... [E]vidently, it is necessary to radically change politics, but within the legal system at our disposal, without calling for the destruction of everything that exists.”³³¹ In the discourse of Le Pen God is not neutral. Sometimes ambiguously, other times openly, Le Pen stresses his belief that a supernatural agency will help him in his quest for the salvation of France. As noted by Le Pen, “History, in its intimacy is not a simple succession of causes and effects but an abrupt apparition of founding events,” of what he calls “hours of destiny ... one of

³²⁷ “M. Le Pen veut ‘continuer le combat pour une France française’,” *Le Monde*, April 22, 1995.

³²⁸ “Jean-Marie Le Pen, président du Front national,” *Le Monde*, April 11, 1995.

³²⁹ “Fête de Jeanne d’Arc,” May 1, 2004, in www.frontrnational.com

³³⁰ “Université d’été du Front National à Orange,” September 3, 1999.

³³¹ Bruno Mégret, interview with the author, September 30, 2004.

those manifestations of the Providence.”³³² In a meeting with his militants the leader of the National Front invited the French people, using an expression made famous by John Paul II, to “cross the threshold of hope,” adding: “we are not alone. The people of France have started their liberation and the Providence supports us in its invincible arm.”³³³ At another meeting Le Pen said,

In truth I tell you, I need you, [I need] your forces, your spirits, your will, your hearts, your souls, for the service of only one cause: the sacred cause of France. But the worse is not always certain, men and the Providence can by their will and their efforts to change the direction of destiny.³³⁴

But “having God on their side” is not an invitation for passivity. As asserted by Le Pen to his followers, “Providence may act no matter how weak is the spirit if resistance. But [Providence], as we know it, only helps those who help themselves.”³³⁵ In the “Battle for France” Le Pen has challenged the militants of his movements to “listen [to Joan of Arc], to battle, and God will give us the victory.”³³⁶ The use of religious rhetoric by Le Pen has found the opposition of some sectors of the Catholic Church. During the presidential electoral campaign of 2002 the Paris archbishop, Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger asserted in a press release that “The Church and the Christians cannot accept that the meaning of religious symbols and convictions be changed to serve the political debate.”³³⁷

Concomitantly, Le Pen’s tendency of devising an apocalyptic scenario in his discourse has made even some members within his party uncomfortable. During the schism of the late nineties Le Pen’s apocalyptical tendency was invoked by some as a reason to leave the party. The members of the National Front’s Union in the universities said that one of the main reasons they were departing from Le Pen was because they could not recognize themselves in a man who “declares that he will come to power _ which testifies to a national surge in his eyes _ in the afterward of exceptional, even apocalyptical events in our country We want to come to power not in chaos but after

³³² “Préface,” Jean Marie-Le Pen in Brissaud, Jean-Marc, *op.cit.* p.7.

³³³ “Meeting de Marseille,” May 2, 2002.

³³⁴ “21^{ème} Fête des Bleu-Blanc-Rouge,” September 23, 2001.

³³⁵ “Université d’été du Front National à Orange,” *op.cit.*

³³⁶ “Fête de Jeanne d’Arc,” May 1, 2000.

³³⁷ “Communiqué du Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, archevêque du district de Paris, le 22 avril 2002.”

convincing a majority of our compatriots.”³³⁸ The fact of the matter is that the vision of the apocalypse has always fueled the discourse of Le Pen.

• Rituals

The National Front has regularly promoted rituals that continually reinforce the identity of the group as the last of the patriots and saviors of the country and the role of Le Pen as their guide towards salvation. These organized mass events occur several times every year. Among them are: the celebration since 1981 of the BBR, the *Fête des Bleu-Blanc-Rouge* or party of the Blue-White-Red, the colors of the French national flag; the tribute to Joan of Arc, held since 1979 on the May first of every year to celebrate the 15th century French Heroine; the *Université d'été* or Summer school, where the ideology of the party is debated and discussed; the *rentrée politique*, the start of the political season, held many times in Le Pen's hometown in Brittany, La Trinité-sur-Mér. The focal point of all these celebrations is a *grand discours*, a solemn speech by the leader of the National Front. Together with these events, the National Front organizes several street protests and parades, many times headed by the leader himself, to denounce either the wrong policies of the establishment or the persecution of the National Front by the “political-media caste.” All of these rites help to foster a sense of collectivity and play a crucial role in legitimizing the Salvationist function of Le Pen. In these events there is often an interchange between the political and religious realm where Le Pen deliberately positions himself not as a mere political person but as a preacher with a message of salvation. This ambiguity is dominant in the rites of the National Front.

For example, in his campaign against the treaty of Maastricht, Le Pen decided to give a speech to his militants in the historical city of Reims, where Clovis converted to Christianity, a pivotal moment in the consolidation of “eternal France.” This speech became known in the literature of the National Front, appropriately, as “the sermon of

³³⁸ “Les Jeunes militants quittent l'homme providentiel,” *Le Monde*, January 24-25 1999.

Reims.”³³⁹ Originally the plan of Le Pen was to give a “solemn declaration,” inside the square of the cathedral of Reims. To his outrage the authorities barred the interior of the cathedral to Le Pen invoking the 1905 law that codified the separation of church and state. At the occasion the spokesman of the bishops of France noted, “It seems that the National Front likes to keep alive some sort of ambiguity.”³⁴⁰ Le Pen went ahead with the meeting with his militants positioning himself slightly outside of the cathedral space. In his sermon, Le Pen put forward a narrative that abundantly stressed his mission of saving France. In a typical manner he emphasized “many times [in history] the idea of homeland was kept alive by a few men,” and noted that “the peoples do not forge their destiny alone. To guide them heroes, wise men, saints and martyrs are needed.”³⁴¹ These words served as the background for a prime example of Le Pen’s missionizing messianic rhetoric. He declared,

My dear Frenchmen and Frenchwomen, my dear compatriots, people ask you, What is the authority that Jean-Marie Le Pen has to talk as an equal to the authorities of the Republic? To pose as an expert on diplomacy? And who has given me [Le Pen] the power to make myself heard, through you, to millions of our compatriots? ... History teaches us that in a battle when the general is injured, or dies, or betrays, the most senior office replaces him. And on and on until, if necessary, the simple soldier, the most courageous, raises the flag. Well, that’s what we do. True, the leaders of France have not died, but they have deserted combat [and] betrayed the interests of the nation.... I accuse therefore the authorities of France of having sullied the flag of France by the incessant display of their corruption and their renunciation ... I accuse the French government and their accomplices of wanting to deliver our flag to an anonymous synarchy... [I]n this context of dereliction, suffered from the people of France, I, myself, in your name, picked up the flag from the mud where they have left her. And I hold her tight to my heart.³⁴²

After identifying himself with the hero who guides the army of true France in the battle for its salvation, Le Pen read a “solemn declaration” having all the attributes of a prayer, an act of communion between the leader and his followers.

[The Maastricht treaty] initiates a process [that will] ineluctably lead to the loss of our freedoms, the dissolution of the state, the erasure of our language and finally to the death of France. Assembled in Reims, this sacred altar of the homeland, symbol of its foundation, rootedness, and perpetuity, we solemnly declare that we refuse the treaty of Maastricht, whose signature and

³³⁹ See, for example, *Le Pen: Une vie française, op.cit.*, p.91

³⁴⁰ “Interdiction d’un rassemblement du FN sur le parvis de la cathédrale de Reims,” *Le Monde*, September 2, 1992.

³⁴¹ “Le Discours du Serment de Reims,” *Présent*, September 11, 1992, p.6.

³⁴² “Le Discours du serment de Reims,” *Présent*, September 14-15, 1992, p.6.

ratifying are sullied of nullification ... we swear to demand justice for the heinous crime and betrayal that would result from abandoning any small fragment of our national sovereignty; we swear to defend the freedoms, the independence, the identity of the French people, its culture, language, and humanist and Christian civilization against the political genocide that constitutes the infamous Maastricht treaty; we swear to fight until the renaissance of our homeland and the recovery of our people.³⁴³

In order to stress the “suicidal” path that is leading France to enslavement and “death,” Le Pen holds rallies at sites that evoke the sacred nature of the French nation. At these events and in these sacred places, Le Pen delivers his most passionate missionizing sermons, enjoining the community to persist in its mission of saving the nation. In January 1999, just before the approval by the French parliament of the treaty of Amsterdam that furthered European integration Le Pen rallied his militants in the city of Versailles. After leading a cortege Le Pen delivered an “appeal” to the French people. In it the history of France is elevated to the condition of myth. Here’s an excerpt:

In the difficult moments of women and men, and it is the same for the life of nations, destiny sends us signs. It speaks, it manifests itself, it adverts, it shows the way. It is maybe because France, our country, lives today [through] very difficult moments that destiny has decided to multiply those signs. Look firstly around you. Something mysterious is talking to us ... We are on a Sunday, January 17, 1999. 206 years ago, in the same day, Louis XVI was sentenced to death and, with him, it was the monarchy’s sovereignty that it was sentenced. Today it is the sovereignty of the Nation that the men of the Europe of Maastricht and Amsterdam, the men of a federal order, are getting ready to sentence to death.³⁴⁴

In Versailles, living symbol of France, Le Pen, in an emotional manner, reminded his militants of the grandiosity of the nation, a living and Holy Communion of people, history, territory and destiny, threatened of debasement and extinction:

France, mother of Saints, Heroes, Martyrs, mother of the French people born from the Celts, the Greeks, the Galois, Romans, Visigoths, Franks, Britons, Normands and others, that commune in one of the most beautiful languages of the world, the clearest one, the most classy. France of the menhirs and dolmens, of chapels and cathedrals, caves and palaces. France that doesn’t stop its downhill trend, that doesn’t finish giving itself away to the point of forgetting its own children. France ? Are you at the end of your path of suffering and glory? A few hundred felon

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ “Manifestation contre le traité d’Amsterdam à Versailles,” January 17, 1999, in www.frontnational.com

parliamentarians are going to sell you to the Europe of merchants and financiers, under the indifferent eye of the dumbfounded people?³⁴⁵

Le Pen concluded by identifying the struggle of the National Front as “the combat of good and [the combat] of life.”³⁴⁶ Le Pen, surrounded by close advisers and militants, regularly visits sites that for him represent the sacredness of the nation, the land of “Saints and Martyrs.” For example, in August 2001, on the day he delivered the speech that started his political season, in his birthplace, Le Pen spent the day touring different sites. He started with a prayer in the Basilica of Saint Anne, followed by an homage in the memorial of the Britons who died “for the homeland” in the World War I, and finally to a visit to the mausoleum of the General George Cadoudal, French Royalist who remained true to his cause after the revolution and was sentenced to death after a failed attempt to kill Napoleon. In a press conference when asked about why he committed so much time visiting these sites Le Pen replied,

I choose the symbolic places of the history of our country. Since many people accept without knowing, what is going to happen to them, that France will cease to exist tomorrow, I remind them of what this people has been, what was demanded not too long ago of the French: the possibility of sacrifice of one’s life for *the defense of sacred notions*, [emphasis is mine] those of territory, of the Republic, of the nation and its people, with its freedoms and independence.³⁴⁷

Intimately linked with Le Pen’s casting himself as a savior is his relentless promotion of the sacred nature of his message. His words gain the stature and the symbolism of a prophecy. Le Pen elevates himself to the status of the bearer of a sacred truth that the forces of anti-France are constantly conspiring to hide from the French population. The rituals of the National Front foster an alternative symbolic system to the one encouraged by the establishment. The construction of this alternative world of symbols and rites is essential in the solidification of the identity of the group. As stated

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁷ “Le Pen à La Trinité : Une grande journée entre symboles et espoirs,” in *National-Hebdo*, 23-29 August 2001.

by David Kertzer, “the struggle of groups seeking to delegitimize the new order involves a fierce struggle over symbolism.”³⁴⁸

The alter world of the National Front has at its basis in an alternative history, a different interpretation of the present and a different concept of truth. In this narrative, only a minority shares and valiantly defends the truth announced by Le Pen. But slowly the truth will be delivered to the rest of the French population and they will be set free from the false truth that has brainwashed into them over the years. As noted by Le Pen, “to survive is not only a right but a duty for everyone ... but to survive it is necessary to know. That is why nothing is more worthwhile than creating the truth. [When the truth] starts its march, nothing will stop her.”³⁴⁹ In a solemn speech to his militants assembled at one of the Blue-White-Red celebrations, Le Pen declared,

That is why our political combat is firstly and above all a combat for the first of the values, the truth. Because, as stated by John the Evangelist “It is the truth that will set us free” ... It is normal that our courage and lucidity be recognized. [Our] perspicacity to discern the truth and the courage to tell it at any cost ... be it about immigration, unemployment, insecurity, finance, demography, national defense, moral laxity, drugs, aids, we were proved right. And I could legitimately display all over France: “Le Pen was right.” He was right and he continues to be right! Together with you!³⁵⁰

As noted by Le Pen, “I think that one of the fundamental missions of the public man, in a democratic world, is to reveal the truth.”³⁵¹ In fact a typical way that Le Pen describes any surge of support for the National Front is by declaring that “the French are finding the truth.”³⁵² “We want to tell our compatriots the truth that will set us free,” is a regular motto in the meetings of Le Pen with the militants.³⁵³ The identification of Le Pen with the truth is a constant in the imagery of the National Front. Le Pen is heralded as a liberator because when people come to know the sacred truth revealed by Le Pen they become liberated and join the community of the “Elect.”

³⁴⁸ Kertzer, David, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, Yale University Press, 1988, p.178.

³⁴⁹ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les français d'abord*, *op.cit.*, p.152.

³⁵⁰ “Le discours de Jean-Marie Le Pen aux BBR,” *Présent*, October 4, 1995, p.6.

³⁵¹ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *L'Espoir*, *op.cit.*, p.148.

³⁵² “Université d’été, Beaune, 30 août,” in *Le Pen 91*, *op.cit.*, p.237.

³⁵³ “M.Le Pen veut ‘continuer le combat pour une France française,’” *Le Monde*, April 22, 1995.

His arrival at one of the congresses of the party was accompanied by the sound of "The Choir of Slaves," from the Verdi's opera *Nabucco*.³⁵⁴ This not mere folklore but rather a powerful symbolism revealing the mission of Le Pen, "The Liberator." A series of poster promoted relentlessly by the National Front showed Le Pen gagged under the headline "Le Pen tells the truth, they gag him," or "they want to gag France."³⁵⁵ In his political career Le Pen has incessantly described himself as a common sense politician and has said many times that "he says out loud what most French people think."³⁵⁶ At the same time he indicts the French population for not coming forward, for not having the courage to join the community of the patriots, and for letting themselves be methodically brainwashed by the forces of anti-France. They are letting their natural defenses, their instinctual common sense being destroyed by unnatural ideologies. As Le Pen as written,

France is in a bad state, much worse than it seems. She is on the verge of a decline that can rapidly lead to her disappearance and the people, drugged, socially and by the media, does not know it, although many have a presentiment about it. In order to avoid her [France] terrible tests she must react as soon as possible. The truth must help her to find herself and to resume in the twenty first century the glorious road that she has draw during the centuries.³⁵⁷

A poster distributed all over France promoted a personal message from Le Pen to the French people: "I ask the providence to inspire all the French the lucidity, the courage, the pride that is too often lacking them today ..."³⁵⁸

To further his dimension as a truth-bearer Le Pen hardly misses an occasion to stress his clairvoyance. Le Pen has repeated that the ability to predict should be characteristic of politicians. "We are," he said, "those who light up the politics [of France], that is why our logo is a flame."³⁵⁹ Regarding the evils of communism Le Pen asserted that it was the National Front "who saw clearly, who saw far ... this prescience, this prediction of communism was imprinted in our permanent action and in the denunciation of communism we were the first."³⁶⁰ The same can be said about the phenomenon of Aids, "A few years ago I was the first one to cry out public alarm for the

³⁵⁴ Schonhuber, Franz, *Le Pen, L'indomptable*, Editions Les Presses Bretonnes, 1998, p.91.

³⁵⁵ See, for example, *20 Ans au Front, L'histoire vraie du Front National*, op.cit, p.62.

³⁵⁶ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *Les Français d'abord*, op.cit, p.12.

³⁵⁷ *Le Pen: Une vie française*, op.cit, p.177.

³⁵⁸ *20 Ans au Front: L'Histoire Vraie du Front National*, op.cit, p.86.

³⁵⁹ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *L'Espoir*, op.cit, p.111-112.

danger.”³⁶¹ Regarding excessive immigration Le Pen observed: “It was the National Front, I claim, that put this affair at the center of public discussion. Historically it will be our honor ... I had a presentiment about it and I said it at a time when it was not easy to be heard.”³⁶² To him the controversies surrounding the French state’s ban on headscarves in public schools are just an offshoot of the real issue, “anarchic and uncontrolled immigration.”³⁶³ The headscarf ban, the street protests of Muslims that followed and bomb attacks and vandalism acts on Jewish and Muslim sites only proved that the National Front was right in alerting the public against the disruptive and dangerous phenomenon of immigration.³⁶⁴ The Islamic terrorist attacks in Spain constituted a “solemn warning” because France was “the most vulnerable European country due to a mad immigration policy for more than thirty years.”³⁶⁵ As Le Pen said in a speech,

Who has had up until now the courage to tell the truth about the unemployment, immigration, insecurity, aids, infected blood, Chernobyl, mad cow disease? The National Front!! ... Therefore it was our analyses that for thirty years have been proved right, our criticisms have been proved just, and our solutions constructive.³⁶⁶

Linked with the image of Le Pen as a truth teller is the image of Le Pen as a victim. Because Le Pen “tells the truth” the powerful forces of anti-France persecute him. Le Pen becomes in this way “the martyr,” the one who makes great sacrifices and endures suffering for his beliefs and his unconditional defense of the French people. Referring to what was perceived as a diabolical campaign launched by the political and media establishment against Le Pen during the runoff for the 2002 presidential elections Yves Daoudal wrote, “Le Pen [for the establishment] is not the candidate defending French independence and for putting France in the right track: he is fascism, Hitler, he is the absolute Evil: he is the devil.”³⁶⁷ Daoudal called it a “media lynching”³⁶⁸ of Le Pen. Every time Le Pen perceives bias from either the political establishment or the press

³⁶⁰ “Université d’été,” in *Le Pen 91*, *op.cit.*, pp.280-281

³⁶¹ Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *L’Espoir*, *op.cit.*, p.147.

³⁶² Le Pen, Jean-Marie, *La France est de retour*, *op.cit.*, pp.84-85.

³⁶³ *Les Français d’Abord – Le Magazine de Jean-Marie Le Pen*, “Intégration,” January 2004.

³⁶⁴ “Question Ouverte – Invité Jean-Marie Le Pen,” January 29, 2004, www.france2.fr

³⁶⁵ “Résister ou disparaître,” *Les Français d’Abord*, March 18, 2004.

³⁶⁶ “Fête de Jeanne d’Arc du 1^{er} mai 2003,” in www.frontnational.com

³⁶⁷ Daoudal, Yves, *Le Tour Infernal : 21 Avril-5 Mai 2002, Analyse d’une fantasmagorie électorale*, Paris, Editions Godefroy de Bouillon, 2002, p.11.

against him or the National Front, he promotes a campaign with solemn declarations, street protests, parades denouncing his persecution. After being barred as a candidate in the regional elections of 2004, for example, because he failed to prove that he lives in the Provence-Alps-Riviera region, Le Pen lambasted what he saw as a “mini-conspiracy” against him and cast himself as a victim: “As in Iran with the guards of the revolution, in France the guards of corruption eliminate in advance their opponents.”³⁶⁹ A demonstration of support was organized, and Le Pen gave a speech to his militants in which he declared himself the victim of a bureaucratic-administrative persecution. The newspaper close to the National Front *National Hebdo* put Le Pen on his front-page under the headline, “the guards of corruption persist in their fight against their only opponent.”³⁷⁰ This is a typical manner in which Le Pen props himself up in times of adversity and at the same time deeply imprints his status as a martyr and hero upon the collective imagination of the community of the loyal party members. This rite of martyrdom is repeated with regularity.

These party rituals correspond both to a worshipping of Le Pen, as the interpreter through whom the will of the nation is expressed, and of the sacredness of the collective mission of the community of patriots. They further correspond to what Emile Durkheim called a “totemic experience” of the members of a clan, a repeated way of revivifying “their common faith by manifesting it in common.”³⁷¹ As written by a militant, “in his meetings Le Pen becomes the prophet and he infuses in his public the great poetry that is born from the nationalist sentiment, that meeting of conviction, courage and faith.”³⁷² National Front ideologue François Brigneau called the party’s Blue-White-Red celebration a liturgy, a “Mass,” because, “[French] that come from all the regions of France, from all sorts of creeds and social status, and who in the past have had disagreements, *commune* together, and fervently demonstrate the love that they feel for the homeland, the land of the fathers.”³⁷³ At the same time the Blue-White Red celebration is “above all a tribute to Jean-Marie Le Pen.” In Brigneau’s words,

³⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.41

³⁶⁹ “Un ‘boomerang’ nommé Le Pen,” *Les Français d’abord ! Quotidien* February 25, 2004.

³⁷⁰ *National Hebdo*, February 26-March 5, 2004.

³⁷¹ Durkheim, Émile, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, The Free Press, 1947 edition, p.210.

³⁷² “Du Talent nommé Le Pen,” in *National-Hebdo*, January 28-February 3 1999.

³⁷³ François Brigneau, “le journal d’un homme libre,” *National Hebdo*, 15-21 September 1994.

A whole little people, swarming with life and hope, express to him their gratitude for having managed to create, progress, and defend (sometimes against his own self-interest) this unprecedented national gathering. For the simple people, whom bourgeois conformism has not ruined, the man they call Jean-Marie possesses a number of rare qualities in today's [world]. He has physical and intellectual courage ... that is why the BBR are a day of celebration for Jean-Marie Le Pen. It rewards him for so many hardships, disappointments, blows.³⁷⁴

Pierre Monnier expressed similar sentiment writing about the National Front's annual tribute to Joan of Arc. To him the mainstream technocratic political establishment could never understand the attachment between Le Pen and his people. According to him,

They don't understand, those beautiful minds, that the French who salute the statue of Joan and that march on the road where one of them waits, a Briton named Jean-Marie Le Pen, in whom they recognize themselves ... Charles Péguy called these French the "*piétaille*" [the infantry] ... they advance side by side with "the little girl hope" ... I think that if, although it is impossible, Jean-Marie was attacked by lassitude, it would be enough for him to look at those children, those women, those men who march towards the statue of Joan.³⁷⁵

• A Moral Community

In fact, when Le Pen addresses the militants of the National Front he puts special emphasis on the emotional values that bind the community together. *Sacrifice* is prime among these. In order to reach the goal of saving France the community of patriots goes through enormous sacrifices. "We think," he noted, "that the spirit of devotion and sacrifice is an integral part of our doctrine of action ... the homeland is not constituted only by those who are alive but also those who died as heroes, those who sacrifice themselves for the defense of their freedom."³⁷⁶ Le Pen asked his militants at a meeting, "don't you feel a little bit of happiness for coming here?" He added, "Don't you feel already rewarded, being so close to each other, for all the sacrifices we have to make?"³⁷⁷ According to Le Pen, "the militants of the National Front are the civic elite of the nation,

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ Monnier, Pierre, *op.cit.*, pp. 154-156

³⁷⁶ Marcilly, Jean, *op.cit.*, p.188.

the soul of its continuity ... if there is still a chance of renaissance for France we can say that it is due to them, to their devotion, to their sacrifices, their enthusiasm.”³⁷⁸

Furthermore Le Pen often describes the National Front as a community of *love*. Le Pen has always described himself as a “patriot of love.”³⁷⁹ In a speech he noted, “in the France in which we call all French to fight for ... the criteria is the criteria of love, that is the criteria of the service of France.”³⁸⁰ To him, “[when] we love our compatriots, the ideal entity that they represent, in time and space, we construct and develop in our hearts and souls the love for the homeland.”³⁸¹ In fact, when Le Pen addresses his militants, he repeatedly stresses the fact that they are gathered together “in the same love for the homeland.”³⁸² The virtue of *hope* is also dominant in the discourse of Le Pen. At a meeting he asked, “What will the future look like? Only God knows it. But we have, we, the imperious duty of trying to discern its shape, evaluating the dangers but also the promises, because men need hope to live.”³⁸³ Le Pen declared at one of the Blue-White-Red celebrations, “As long as there are men who love France and devote themselves to her, as long as there is a French people, conscious of being French, there is a serious hope of victory.”³⁸⁴ “For the people we offer ... a future of hope, conscious that the people will build a future of hope with us.”³⁸⁵

In the discourse of Le Pen the community of the remnant patriots is glued together by *faith*. He stresses that it is this faith that makes them overcome all the obstacles in their road to save France. “We know that the main enemy is inside of us,” observed Le Pen, “it is doubt, the renunciation of effort and of independence, discouragement, and despair.”³⁸⁶ Faith, however, is the answer to man’s weaknesses:

Sometimes people ask me, “Facing such adversity, aren’t you discouraged, desperate?” I confess that sometimes doubt comes to me like it has come to the minds of the greatest saints. It’s true,

³⁷⁷ “Discours de Saint-Franc,” *op.cit.*, p.145.

³⁷⁸ “Nous sommes prêts pour la relève.” *National Hebdo*, 25-31 August 1994.

³⁷⁹ *Le Pen: images d’un français*, *op.cit.*, p.26.

³⁸⁰ “Université d’été, Beaune, 30 août,” in *Le Pen 91*, *op.cit.*, p.286.

³⁸¹ “Gloire à l’armée française, non au socialisme, Mutualité, 22 février,” in *Le Pen 91 : Analyses et Propositions*, *op.cit.*, p.19.

³⁸² “Fête de Jeanne d’Arc du 1er mai 2003,” *op.cit.*

³⁸³ “Conseil National du Front National,” September 20, 2003, in *www.frontnational.com*

³⁸⁴ “21ème Fête des Bleu-Blanc-Rouge 2001,” *op.cit.*

³⁸⁵ “Université d’été, Beaune 30 août,” *op.cit.*

³⁸⁶ “Fête de Jeanne d’Arc du 1er mai 2003,” *op.cit.*

our forces apparently are so feeble compared to those of our opponents or enemies, at a time when a torrent of moral, political and social decadence seems to push irresistibly the world towards unknown apocalypses ... It is necessary then to study in doubt, but to act in faith. There is only one cure to doubt: it is prayer. Well, the prayer of the militant is political action.³⁸⁷

Le Pen has repeatedly described the work of the militants in terms of faith. Political action is neither a minor nor an expedient activity but a way that the militants give meaning to their lives and fulfill their faith in the mission of salvation of France. Le Pen has emphasized the faith-based character of the National Front militancy many times, in different ways. To him the internal dynamics of the National Front's militancy corresponds to those of a pious group that is united by a common faith and devoted to a common cause. "The church [of the militant]," said Le Pen at one event, "is the National Front."³⁸⁸ In this way it is not surprising that Le Pen talks about political propaganda in a proselytizing manner. The ultimate goal of the militant is not to simply convince others, but to convert. In the campaign against the Maastricht treaty, Le Pen made an appeal to his militants: "Any one of you, any conscious citizen must considerer himself as a missionary ... in order to snatch the undecided, those who don't know or haven't already understood, or those who make excuses."³⁸⁹ "Joining the National Front is a solemn act of engagement," he said at another occasion. "It represents a promise of action ... [the militant] has to recruit others who in turn recruit others in order to make a snowball that will end up to be the majority."³⁹⁰ At meetings he regularly thanks the militants for "testifying" with their presence their faith in the National Front.³⁹¹ At the end of a speech in the city of Dions Le Pen thanked his audience "for making an effort to come here" and added that "I believe that one day you will be proud to say: 'I was in Dions, me too, to testify for the National Front.'"³⁹² "Thank you all of you" he opened his solemn speech at one of the Blue-White-Red celebrations, "who came from the most remote areas of France to find your friends and compatriots, and testify to the vitality and ardor of the

³⁸⁷ "Université d'été du Front National à Orange," *op.cit.*

³⁸⁸ "Conseil National du Front National," *op.cit.*

³⁸⁹ "Le discours de Jean-Marie Le Pen à La Trinité," *Présent*, September 3, 1992.

³⁹⁰ "Discours du Bourget BBR, 13 octobre," in *Le Pen 91*, p.316.

³⁹¹ See, for example, "Discours de Bagatelle, 23 septembre," in *Le Pen 90*, *op.cit.*, p.110.

³⁹² "Discours de Dions, extraits, 1er juillet," in *Le Pen 90*, *op.cit.* p.67.

National Front.”³⁹³ The militants become witnesses to the spreading, in the words of Le Pen, of “*la bonne parole*,” (the good word).³⁹⁴

The rituals promoted by the National Front increase this dynamic of integration into an alternative world where the community of believers, who go through great tribulations in order to reach their salvific mission, is set apart from the ordinary reality and celebrate their collective identity as the “Elect.” The President of the National Front of Youth describes these meeting in specifically religious terms. According to Louis-Armand de Béjarry,

As in religions, the great gatherings keep alive the ‘faith’ of the militants: they notice that they are not alone in having their ideas, that the National Front is powerful, organized, gatherer. The speeches, in front of thousands of people, serve to give the watchwords, slogans that the militants will use to persuade people. It is exactly the same function as the Sunday mass: the communion to bind together the believers, and the sermon to give instructions or explains some details of the doctrine ... [The militants] can also personally meet the officials, shake their hands, and talk to them. For them it is a sort of reward. These gatherings give courage and the will to fight to the militants, who go home very motivated.³⁹⁵

This internal process of integration is coupled with an external dynamic of integration. Several studies have shown that a person who joins the National Front experiences a gradual process of stigmatization from the rest of society. On one hand, the National Front promotes an alternative world on the other hand, the party is often perceived as a dangerous pariah to members of the “other France.” This dynamic of outsiderhood is essential to an understanding of the missionary nature of the community of true believers of the National Front. They see themselves as different and set apart not only from militants of other parties but also from that “passive France,” still resistant to the Front’s message yet whom the militants are duty-bound to convert. The following words of Eric Domard attest to this notion deep rooted among the militants of being a community under siege who endure pain, sacrifices, and persecutions in order to realize their mission:

³⁹³ “Le Discours de Jean-Marie Le Pen aux BBR,” *Présent*, October 4 1995, p.5.

³⁹⁴ “Conseil National du Front National, 20 septembre 2003,” *op.cit.*

³⁹⁵ Louis-Armand de Béjarry, President of the FNJ (*Front National de la Jeunesse*), interview to the author, July 5, 2004.

It is difficult today to be a militant of the National Front. To belong to and defend the ideas of a party constantly demonized, vilified, put in the dock of society, may be difficult to live [through] and endure. To be a militant of the National Front demands a surplus of courage, determination that we do not find anywhere else. Through the adversity and the hostile environment in which they live, the militants of the National Front bind themselves into a moral force and [develop] a capacity to take blows. It is this supplement of motivation that illustrates the difference between the militants of the National Front and those of other parties.³⁹⁶

From its beginning the National Front has been the target of protests and counter-manifestations, and there have been confrontations and aggressions with anti-Front groups, such as *Ras Le Front* which, in the name of “anti-fascism,” pledges to disrupt the meetings and fight the militants of the Nation Front across the French territory.³⁹⁷ The National Front media registers every attack on its militants and accuses many times the authorities of complacency.³⁹⁸ This perception of being constantly under physical threat and danger fuels the integration process of the militants of the party. As noted by Patrick Binder, “differently from other militants, those of the National Front are regularly assaulted, verbally or physically, every time they engage in militant action (holding signs, poster, etc)”³⁹⁹ The following words of Louis-Armand de Béjarry offer a powerful testimony of a community who feels besieged.

The militants of the National Front are different from other militants. Their degree of engagement is truly superior: they put up posters at night and many times are attacked. They distribute leaflets on the streets, many times under insults. The militants of the National Front never trigger the indifference of people, contrary to the militants of other parties. They often trigger hostility, which creates among them a particular mentality, a sentiment of being apart, of having almost the entire world against them, which makes them bind together [even more] closely. The militants form a true community.⁴⁰⁰

In this scenario where political action is not partial but all-consuming and full of sacrifices and risks, Le Pen, in the eyes of the militants, appears as a true authentic leader. His life-story, his role as the founder of the party and all the perceived campaign of hatred against him dramatically bolster his leadership credentials. In their eyes, Le Pen, constantly demonized and persecuted, embodies all the tribulations that the militants have

³⁹⁶ Eric Domard, Journalist of *Français d'abord*, Interview to the author, May 25, 2004.

³⁹⁷ The group has its own magazine and has published a “Manual of Combat against the National Front.” See, www.raslfront.org

³⁹⁸ See, for example, “Haine anti-FN” in *Français d'Abord, Quotidien*, March 3, 2004.

³⁹⁹ Patrick Binder, President of the FN Group in the Alsace region, interview to the author, July 2, 2004.

to go though. He offers a powerful example, to follow and be emulated, of someone who – under trying circumstances - never wavered in his commitment to the mission of saving France. According to Dominique Martin, “Jean-Marie Le Pen gives us the desire, the taste, the courage, the pride ... of fighting for France, for their elder and their children.”⁴⁰¹ In this manner, the leader plays also plays the function of the first militant of the group. “Maybe the militants see Jean-Marie Le Pen a militant like themselves,” commented Béjarry, who added that,

It cannot be forgotten that before he became an elected official for the FN, in 1984, for almost 20 years he had been in politics almost alone, leading a minuscule party. He has been very obstinate and always believed in his chances. All of that cannot but seduce the militants. In fact, Jean-Marie Le Pen is more a militant than a politician. He has the mentality of one who gives everything without expecting anything in return, he has the plain-spokenness and the comradeship of a militant. He is like a ‘primus inter pares,’ the first of the militants of the National Front.⁴⁰²

This personal attachment between the militant and the leader is a crucial aspect of the leadership of Le Pen. Le Pen relentlessly tours France and participates in all kind of gatherings with the militants from local sections, in such occasions such as “breakfast-debates,” “dinner-debates,” festivals or picnics in the countryside. During times of dissent and schism, Le Pen embarks on what he calls “patriotic meetings” in order to reinforce the militants’ commitment to his person. Le Pen gives his followers an opportunity to publicly recognize their leader and to testify to their loyalty. In these occasions the militants see, hear and talk to their leader. These patriotic meetings were particularly active, sometimes held twice a week all over France, during the big schism of the late nineties.⁴⁰³

At a time when party militancy in France and in Europe in general is on the wane, the militancy of the National Front remains strong and mobilized. Militants actively participate in the rallies, parades and meetings of the party. A recent study has shown that the militants of the National Front are the most active and visible cybernauts on

⁴⁰⁰ Louis-Armand de Béjarry, President of the *FNJ* (Front National de la Jeunesse), June 4, 2004.

⁴⁰¹ Dominique Martin, President of the FN Group in the Haute-Savoie region, May 22, 2004.

⁴⁰² Louis-Armand de Béjarry, President of the *FNJ* (Front National de la Jeunesse), Interview with the author, June 4, 2004.

⁴⁰³ “M.Le Pen tente de reconquérir ses militants et les électeurs,” *Le Monde*, 17-18 January 1999.

discussion groups of the Internet.⁴⁰⁴ Also, the electoral support that they give in each election to the FN is consistently high. In contrast, militants of other parties vote for their parties in much lower numbers. The typical FN militant is a loyal voter and a dedicated party worker.⁴⁰⁵ Valérie Lafont sees the National front as a “total institution, similar to a religious sect revealing the world ...by an ideological discourse that wants to change history ...offering in the first place the dream and hope in a different future, a better future.”⁴⁰⁶ Le Pen acts as the guiding Prophet who empowers his followers by elucidating for them who they are, who the “others” opposing them are, and what the collective mission is. The leader gives them a sense of purpose and potency, a sense of participation in history.

• Charisma

Le Pen’s popular level of charisma has undoubtedly helped the party. He is a powerful speaker, and his interventions are full of formulas and sound bites that captivate the media. In today’s visual media-oriented elections Le Pen has the ability to put on a good show. Le Pen is an entertainer. “He is at ease,” wrote Nonna Mayer, “He provides formulas, counterarguments ... and each of his appearances constitutes a show.”⁴⁰⁷ However, Le Pen’s main asset within the National Front is his capacity to develop a missionary level of charisma that makes him the avatar of the aspirations of the entire community of patriots. Throughout his leadership, the charisma of Le Pen has been maintained by the incessant work of what I call the “Le Pen industry,” and the development of powerful religious rites and symbols of integration.

⁴⁰⁴ “Le Front National dans les Newsgroups,” Datops 2004, www.datops.com

⁴⁰⁵ Mayer, Nonna, *Ces Français Qui Votent Le Pen*, Paris, Flammarion, 2002, p.207

⁴⁰⁶ Lafont, Valerie “Les Jeunes Militants du Front National: Trois Modèles d’Engagement et de Cheminement,” *Revue Française de Science Politique*, Vol.51, No.1-2, February-April 2001, p.195.

3.3 The Succession of the Charismatic Leader

Finally, and particularly since the beginning of this decade, the 75-year-old Le Pen has been preparing a post-National front without his leadership and working actively to raise the status of his own daughter, 36-year-old Marine Le Pen, within the party. A lawyer in her second marriage and with three children, Marine is telegenic and well spoken. She appeals not only to the media but also to the female electorate that over the years has showed itself to be more resistant to the National Front. She has taken on her shoulders the task, in her words, of “de-demonizing” the party’s hard-line image.⁴⁰⁸ Le Pen has said that “she has the material to become, one day, the president of the Front.”⁴⁰⁹ She has been gaining increasing visibility in the media and influence within the party although there are veterans within the party who do not seem comfortable with the prospect of Marine Le Pen succeeding her father. The ascension of Marine Le Pen seems to be a natural corollary of the personal charismatic leadership of the National front. Le Pen has always given prominent party roles to family members, from his son-in-law Samuel Marechall, to his wife and daughters. This has caused some to accuse Le Pen of nepotism. In the words of the former National Front general delegate Bruno Mégret, “Le Pen always favors his family, his ‘clan’ ... [and] even wanted to put his wife as the head of the list to the European elections of 1999 although she’s never been involved in politics. The National Front is a family enterprise.”⁴¹⁰ To him the National Front is too intricately linked with its leader: “The National Front lives by and for Le Pen”, which will undermine its future when the moment of replacement of leadership comes.⁴¹¹ There is an anti-Marine Le Pen wing in the National Front led among others by Jacques Bompard, the National Front mayor of Orange and Bernard Antony, the founder of *Chrétienté Solidarité*, a Christian group close to the party. Marine Le Pen is accused of trying to lead the party into a dangerous path of “normalization.” To these critics, Marine

⁴⁰⁷ Mayer, Nonna, *op.cit*, p.186.

⁴⁰⁸ “The New Face of France’s Far Right,” in *The New York Times*, *op.cit*.

⁴⁰⁹ “Marine Le Pen ou la gageure de la dédiablement,” in *Le Monde*, August 23, 2003.

⁴¹⁰ Bruno Mégret, President of the MNR (Mouvement National Republicain), Interview to the author, July 2, 2004.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid*, June 28, 2004.

Le Pen, who repeatedly states that “we cannot gain power by being just rebels,” in her desire to approximate the party to more mainstream parties is putting the party in danger of losing its own identity and of being a “true alternative”. These more traditionalist voices accuse her of being too soft on such issues as immigration abortion and gay rights.⁴¹²

But the fact of the matter is that Le Pen’s effort in raising his own daughter profile within the party as a “potential next leader” is part of the continuous work of maintenance and protection of his charisma that he has performed since the foundation of the National Front. However the method has its obvious risks due to the fact that Le Pen’s choice is contentious within the National Front. The party, after having been held together in large part by the charismatic domination of the founder, may well split as a result.

4. The Missionary Model- Politics as Salvation

In the verbal and symbolic discourse promulgated by Le Pen, the National Front is a movement that continually progresses on a path of salvation. Le Pen is persistently represented as the guide leading the National Front on the road towards the renaissance of France. A common image in the official literature of the party is that of Le Pen walking alone on a beach towards the horizon where the sky and the sea meet.⁴¹³ The first decade of life of the National Front is commonly described as *La Traversée du Desert*, or “The Crossing of the Desert.”⁴¹⁴ In fact the analogy of the desert is constant in the mythology of the National Front and suggests the image of a suffering people led by the prophet in the direction of the Promised Land. Addressing his followers Le Pen once said,

⁴¹² “La Perspective de la succession de Jean-Marie Le Pen attise les tensions,” in *Le Figaro*, August 23, 2004.

⁴¹³ *20 Ans au Front: L’histoire vraie du Front National, op.cit*, “introduction.”

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*

This movement has existed for ten years: The National Front! I have to say that this crossing of the desert ... makes us proud, [for we have] the pride, in the face of adversity, of continuing to mark the history of our country with a strong will to not be let down by discouragement, aggressions, calumnies, insults, as long as God gives us life. And the History [sic] of our people shows us that spectacular new developments, sensational renaissances have always been possible.⁴¹⁵

On another occasion he thanked his followers, "all of those who have been persecuted because they wanted to remain French," for having the courage of "keeping the faith [while] in the desert."⁴¹⁶ In this way the National Front, through Le Pen, illuminates the path to salvation to the other French who have still not joined the movement.⁴¹⁷ In fact Le Pen has always subscribed to a bigger conception of politics. According to him,

The government of men has the primacy above all other aspects of the life of the community. That's what implies the famous 'politics first,' that is, politics must be not below but in front of all the other activities of the city. Theories, no matter how brilliant, must help people to see. This vision is what characterizes politics. It is this vision that Max Weber demands of the politician, together with passion and sense of responsibilities. They cannot be assigned to the simple manager who lacks the vision of the future and undoubtedly the passion that arises from a sense of urgency. The need for vision in politics ... arises from situations of crisis [for] in those moments where society can be reduced to nothing or worse to slavery, it is necessary to find the supreme defender of the collective values and laws.⁴¹⁸

Politics in a time of crisis is therefore not the domain of technocrats who see it as a judicial activity but the domain of those who, as Le Pen put it to his followers, embrace politics as a "priesthood, the service of the community understood as a disinterested devotion to the cause of natural entities: Family [sic], City, [sic] and the corollary of everything: the Nation [sic]."⁴¹⁹ At the basis of Le Pen's philosophy is a willed, rather than bureaucratic, conception of politics. Drawing no doubt from his heroic vision of history Le Pen puts emphasis on the power of the will to fight resignation and change the course of events. "We are voluntarists," he said at a press conference, "That is, we believe that men can act on their destiny."⁴²⁰ In the vision of Le Pen, France is

⁴¹⁵ "Discours du 9 mai 1982," in Marcily, *op.cit.*, p.150.

⁴¹⁶ "Discours de la Mutualité," *Ibid*, p.205.

⁴¹⁷ See, for example, "Conseil National du Front National," *op.cit.*

⁴¹⁸ "La Politique: Une vision au service du peuple," *Identité : Revue d'Études Nationales*, September/October 1989.

⁴¹⁹ "J'appelle La France à combattre le déclin, la décadence et la servitude," *op.cit.*

⁴²⁰ "Plan de paix et conférence de presse, 22 août," in *Le Pen 90, op.cit.* p.82.

immobilized and at the mercy of the destructive forces of internationalism. Mainstream politicians, due to their technocratic nature, have resigned themselves to an irreversible fusion of France in the “euro-internationalist magma.” The following excerpt reveals the voluntaristic nature of Le Pen’s philosophy.

We think that as long as there are men with will power, there will be a better path [that] France will remain! Events are unpredictable today, and they will play their role, but so the will of men, especially those who are the most loyal and courageous ... We refuse to believe that [the death of the nation] is ineluctable and that the worst is certain. Providence can act no matter how weak the light of the resistance is. But [Providence] only helps, and we know it, those who help themselves.⁴²¹

Behind this grandiose conception of politics is Le Pen’s vision of purification and renewal. The community of “The Elect,” led by Le Pen, is the source of this purification, and when the moment comes they will redeem the entire community. In fact, the renaissance and recovery demanded by Le Pen is at its very basis moral and spiritual and is undertaken in order to reverse France’s drift into materialism. To Le Pen, “the national Front does not restrict its political action to some proposal of amending the constitution or to a narrow political program We know that the recovery of the country implies a spiritual and moral renaissance.”⁴²² “Before the economy comes politics,” observed Le Pen, “and before politics comes morality.”⁴²³ Referring to the national recovery defended by The National Front, Le Pen said,

Our country has a vital need: literally, to comply with the natural order of the world. As stated by Péguy, “order, and only order, creates freedom, disorder creates servitude.” Our children need to be raised in the respect of true values, in the respect of the Good, the Beautiful, and the True. That is our first duty as parents and politicians.⁴²⁴

To Le Pen, France has been drifting away from the natural order of the world since the Enlightenment. The development of an artificial and increasing materialistic internationalist ideology has corrupted the natural and eternal spirit of France. According to Le Pen, “materialism, rationalism, scientism, will be defeated by a formidable

⁴²¹ “Université d’été 1999, du Front National à Orange,” *op.cit.*

⁴²² “Discours du Premier-Mai,” *Le Pen 90, op.cit.*, p.30.

⁴²³ “Université d’été 1999 du Front National à Orange,” *op.cit.*

⁴²⁴ “17ème Fête des Bleu-Blanc-Rouge,” September 26, 1997, in *www.frontnational.com*.

aspiration for a spiritual renewal ... a vital reaction against the programmed death of the human civilization in all its diversity.”⁴²⁵ The spiritual degeneration of France is the most “profound” cause of all the other problems that afflict France. “The enemy is in you,” declared Le Pen in a speech. He added, “It is in the soul of the French that deformation was made. It is at the very end of our heart, our families, our divorces, our churches, our schools, our newspapers, our courts, our books, our false ideas, our negative thinking, that we find the evil that weakens France, the Nation, the State, its survival.”⁴²⁶ In the eyes of Le Pen, France’s future is endangered to the point of soullessness and only a spiritual purification can save her from extinction. For Le Pen when the dangers are abolished the community can engage in a peaceful, balanced and spiritually rich era. He described this scenario of happiness in the following manner:

There are things necessary to the happiness of men, the poetry, the music, the theatre, the language, the taste of being together in these landscapes, the love for the land, the warmth of the family, of the friendship, the communal and shared moral and spiritual values, the sense of God, the love for the creatures and the nature that surround us, a certain taste of happiness. All the things that we have nurtured, developed and defended in France and which make her a model, creating a true need [for France] in the world. Yes, the world also needs France!⁴²⁷

Some of the French, those whom Le Pen likes to call “the most lucid and courageous,” have already followed onto the path towards salvation. In Le Pen’s vision, these true believers, bonded by love and sacrifice, have on their shoulders the collective mission of saving and redeeming the entire community. Their reward will be an ultimate recognition as pioneers of the renaissance of the French nation. In the words of Le Pen,

Those who have fought and continue to fight until the end of their strength, will look at the path covered and say, “mission accomplished,” with pride: I was there. They advance together with all of those who, greater in number everyday, see very well that they do not have any other solution than the nation hence the National Front, [and] with eyes fixed in the goals of tomorrow say: I will be there.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁵ “Université d’été 1999 du Front National à Orange,” *op.cit.*

⁴²⁶ “21ème Fête des Bleu-Blanc-Rouge 2001,” *op.cit.*

⁴²⁷ “Fête de Jeanne d’Arc du 1er Mai 2004,” *op.cit.*

⁴²⁸ “La grande armée populaire s’avance, irrésistible,” in *20 Ans Au Front : l’histoire vraie du Front National*, *op.cit.* p.173.

In the case of Le Pen the development of a missionary ethos of politics involves a long and careful construction of an enclave mentality that relentlessly defines the primacy of Le Pen as the guide and the identity of the group as a monolithic community led by one leader and united in a common mission of saving France from the forces of corruption and disintegration.

Umberto Bossi and the Northern League

1. The Crisis – Renunciation of the Present

The discourse of Umberto Bossi is primarily anchored in a world-rejecting mentality. The political movement initiated by Bossi is centered in a renunciation of the world as it is. According to him, the modern international system of Nation-States initiated a frontal assault in the identity of communities in northern Italy and is therefore responsible both for the present crisis and for centuries of oppression suffered by its peoples. In Bossi's vision the process of unification of the Italian state in the nineteenth century transformed different ethnic, cultural, and economic regions into colonies within an oppressive, centralized, and bureaucratic entity called Italy. From the beginning of the unification process, the resources and economies of the north have been exploited and transferred to a backward and dependent south, and its ethnic distinctiveness has been undermined by an oppressive and artificial Nation-State. As stated by a doctrinal document of the *Lega Nord* (Northern League), "what has entered in crisis is the modern State, based on centralism and bureaucracy. The idea of State is slowly losing the importance that has marked the three last centuries of European history."⁴²⁹ This perceived attack on the identity of the north of Italy constitutes the structural or historical background for the act of the renunciation of the world by the movement led by Umberto Bossi. The first article of Umberto Bossi in *Lombardia Autonomista*, written in 1982, identified the Nation-State as the source of northern desperation:

Today, Lombardy does not belong to the Lombards, Padania does not belong to the people of Padania. [The north] is only a geographic expression without any political value; it is only a territory without rights and facing the invasion of others. Its people is one mass deprived of

⁴²⁹ "Federalismo e Devoluzione," Segreteria Politica Federale, September 2002, p.5.

political identity, anonymously incorporated in a failed Nation-State that drags down [the north] in its endless and hopeless crisis.⁴³⁰

This perception of a deep-rooted crisis has both fueled the discourse of the leader and served as a powerful bond to cement the identity of the group. For Bossi, since the 1950's the dominance of a corrupt system of cartel politics⁴³¹ has made the exercise of government an oligarchic affair between the same old parties, and the judicial investigation of early 1990's (denominated "Clean Hands") that unveiled the mask of favoritism, illegality and corruption of the old party-system were the symptoms, not the causes, of a long-simmering crisis dating back to the formation of the Italian state.

The initial political program of the Lombard League has as its first point the claim for "the self government of Lombardy, overtaking the centralized State with a modern federal State that knows how to respect all the peoples that constitute it."⁴³² Since the outset Umberto Bossi has put forward a framework that identified the group he led as a true "vanguard" of northerners conscious of their identity and united in the mission of liberating the entire community from the subjugation of the centralist and tyrannical Italian State. In order to illustrate this, I will first show how Umberto Bossi reinforces the identity of his group as a revolutionary force that is at the vanguard of history.

2. The Group as the "Vanguard"

• Historical Continuity

Umberto Bossi and his acolytes have made a relentless effort to link the ethnic and cultural roots of the north of Italy to the Germanic branch of Indo-European tribes that populated the continent of Europe in the early Middle Ages. The Lombard and Celtic

⁴³⁰ "Lombards!" *Lombardia Autonomista*, No.1, March 1982.

⁴³¹ On this point see Mair and Katz, "Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The emergence of the Cartel Party," *Party Politics*, 1 (1), January 1995.

⁴³² "Il Programma definitivo della Lega Lombarda," *Lombardia Autonomista*, Giugno 1983.

peoples are heralded in the discourse and literature of the Northern League as the glorious ancestors of the Padania, the term chosen by Umberto Bossi to describe the area north of the Po River Valley in the central-northern regions of the country. "The Padania," observed Bossi in an interview, "is a full-fledged country, a Celtic country." He added, "Nothing in history unites Latinos and Padani."⁴³³ According to Bossi:

The Padania has roots and traditions that lose themselves in the darkness of time, if we observe events without ideological glasses. All the peoples of Padania, in fact, descend from the same originary peoples ... the last group is represented by the Goths, the Lombards and all the Germanic populations stationed in these lands with the fall of the Roman Empire. They influence the physical traits of the Padani and have left us the heritage of attachment to local autonomies and the undying aspiration to freedom. [Those who live in the south] are in fact heirs to the Etruscan, Greek and Italian populations stationed first in the Mediterranean basin and then in the coasts of the peninsula. So-called Italy is therefore cut into two ethnic roots.⁴³⁴

Bossi's intent is to bond the community with the traditions and history of central Europe. The Padania is many times described by Bossi as part of *Mittleuropa*, the regions of central Europe once part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. To Bossi, the area of *Mittleuropa* "is the natural market of our area [and has] common traditions, cultures and mentalities."⁴³⁵ In Bossi's view the Padania has more affinities with countries such as Hungary, Austria and Slovenia than with southern Italy.

In order to emphasize the autonomist tradition of northern Italy, the historical example of the first *Lega Lombarda* is a major reference in Umberto Bossi's discourse. In 1167 the communes of the north of Italy swore in Pontida to stand together against the expansionistic intentions of the Roman-German emperor Federico Barbarossa. It became known as the Oath of Pontida. The battle of Legnano of 1176, where the Lega Lombarda led by Alberto da Giussano defeated the troops of Barbarossa is heralded as a pivotal example of the tradition of liberty of the peoples of the North. The image of this medieval warrior raising a broadsword became the symbol of the Lombard League and later the Northern League. The party of Bossi is commonly known as "the Carroccio" in allusion to the war wagon drawn by oxen used by the medieval republics of Italy. The attempt to

⁴³³ "Niente unisce Padani e latini," in *La Padania*, July 31, 1998.

⁴³⁴ Bossi, Umberto with Daniele Vimercati, *Processo Alla Lega*, Sperling & Kupfer Editori, Milano, 1998, pp.33-34.

⁴³⁵ "La via mitteleuropea per la Padania," in *La Padania*, June 17, 1998.

link the two Leagues pervades the literature of the movement. For example, the headline of one of the issues of *Lombardia Autonomista* was: “1167: defeating the imperial centralism of Barbarossa opens in Europe the democratic age of the communes in Europe. 1989: defeating the centralism of Rome, opens the democratic age of peoples.”⁴³⁶ Bossi establishes constant parallels between the struggle of the first historical union of the peoples of the north and the struggle of his contemporary movement:

Eight hundred years have passed since the great battle of Legnano, that Hegel regarded as crucial for the history of Europe. In Legnano the emperor and his imperialism were defeated and the communes of Europe were able to stand up. Almost a millennium has passed, and it is as if it were yesterday. Also today the peoples of the North unite to hunt the Barbarossa that is in Rome. The new League recovers its origins and is committed to the final battle at the end of which there will be no prisoners: The Padania or the Roman State, one of the two will perish.⁴³⁷

The movement led by Bossi wants to have the same historical impact that the movement led by Alberto da Giussano had in the world. The first *Lega Lombarda*, as Bossi declared in a speech,

Signaled the birth, with the spirit of Padania, of the first liberal civilization. It signaled the birth of the communes, a revolutionary institution that the *Lega* knew how to defend from the emperor, who did not get what he wanted but instead went down to a defeat that marked the end of feudalism. That is why the Padania is an historical force, because it is the catalyst of the new federal era as it was in the past when it invented the modern world.⁴³⁸

For Bossi, the tradition of freedom of the northern community was undercut by the unification of Italy in the nineteenth-century, a process that became known as *Risorgimento*. “The nation that has never existed is not the Padania, but Italy,” observed Bossi.⁴³⁹ For the leader of the Northern League,

The division of Italy, therefore, is not the exception but the rule, and only a dishonest historiography can find in the past any justification for the present borders of the Roman State. The truth is that the unified State post-*risorgimento* was a military construction at the expense of old territorial entities that were based on centuries-old autonomies and freedoms.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁶ *Lombardia Autonomista*, July 1988.

⁴³⁷ Bossi, Umberto, *Il Mio Progetto*, Sperling & Kupfer, Milano, 1996, p.125.

⁴³⁸ “Intervento del Segretario Federale,” Venice, September 15 2002, in www.leganord.org

⁴³⁹ Bossi, Umberto with Daniele Vimercati, *Processo Alla Lega*, *op.cit.*, p.31.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.33.

The centralist tradition brought by the *Risorgimento* persisted through the times and remained untouched by different political systems and regimes. The Italian Republic of post World War II was in essence not different from the fascist regime of Mussolini. In the words of Bossi:

This is not a Republic born from the resistance [against fascism] as stated by the official rhetoric; This is the same old State, untouched from the *Risorgimento* to the liberal period, and from fascism to the Republic. I don't see any fractures in this history ... The State, our centralist State, has never truly overcome fascism. It is the same logic of continuity from the bureaucracy to the magistrates that has absolutely not changed [and] us of the League will try to break, for the first time, this continuity.⁴⁴¹

Prominent in the pantheon of heroes of the Northern League is the figure of the Lombard Carlo Cattaneo. In the nineteenth century he had been one of the main supporters of Italy as a confederation of republics and not as a united Republic. Cattaneo's federalist project included the formation of an autonomous Lombardy-Veneto regional entity. Bossi regularly quotes Cattaneo along with other nineteenth-century federalists, drawing a historical continuity between the federalist project of the nineteenth century and the fight of the Northern League for a federal Italy. In the literature of the party Cattaneo is called the "noble father of federalism," and due to insistence of the Northern League, a bust of the philosopher was inaugurated in the *Montecitorio*, the Italian Parliament.⁴⁴² The non-adoption of Cattaneo's project is viewed as treason against the desire for freedom of Northern Italy. However, in the words of Bossi, "after the betrayal of hope in the *risorgimento*, the *Lega Nord*, the popular movement, has finally opened the possibility of federalism." Umberto Bossi puts the Northern League at the receiving end of a positive historical tradition fighting against all of those forces that represent an oppressive, artificial, and evil historical tradition. The side embodied by the Northern League "is the heir to the Italian traditions of the Renaissance, to the communal multiformity and freedoms, that favored arts, literature and the wealth of the city." The other side, instead, "originates from the habits and social order of the papal, House of

⁴⁴¹ Bossi, Umberto with Daniele Vimercati, *Vento Dal Nord*, Sperling & Kupfer, Milano, 1992, p.128.

⁴⁴² "Carlo Cattaneo, Busto a Montecitorio," in *La Padania*, June 18, 2003.

Savoy. and Bourbon courts, sucking new lymph from the unified Centralist State.”⁴⁴³ Bossi identifies the Northern League as the avatar of centuries-old aspiration that can finally be materialized.

• The Definition of the Group

For Bossi, those who join the struggle of the Northern League join a revolutionary movement, a vanguard of men and women who are united in their efforts both to put an end to the “subjugation” imposed by Rome and to “liberate” the peoples of the north. The Northern League is the harbinger of a new period in time, the “creative factor, the catalyst of a new era, that will be federalism.”⁴⁴⁴ Allies can change, policies can shift, the movement led by Bossi can be either in opposition or support of the central government; but the sense of the Northern League’s dispensation as a revolutionary force of grandiose proportions remains unchanged from the very beginning both in Bossi’s discourse and in the party’s literature. For Bossi,

It must be clear, for those who have forgotten: If the League has any reason to exist is to bring federalism to Italy, to liberate the peoples of the peninsula – and Europe – from the yoke of the State ... For this it was born, for this it has grown and fights without mercy against its eternal enemies. If successful, it wins its historical battle. If not, it fails. There is no middle ground.⁴⁴⁵

Those who join this movement of liberation are a vanguard of courageous people conscious about their history and roots. They represent the foremost position of the peoples of the north. Because they are conscious, aware of their place in history, they have the responsibility of stimulating and awakening the dormant and passive sectors of the northern population who have still not joined this historical struggle. In the words of Bossi,

⁴⁴³ Bossi, Umberto with Daniele Vimercati, *La Rivoluzione*, Sperling & Kupfer, Milano, 1993, p.207.

⁴⁴⁴ Bossi, Umberto, *Il Mio Progetto*, op.cit, p.67.

⁴⁴⁵ Bossi, Umberto, *Tutta La Verità*, op.cit, p.175.

Courage is the first great gift that the League has brought to the Italians. The courage to challenge the corrupts, to remember the roots of history. The courage to confront the old and surpassed ideologies...the courage to denounce the bad government in the *Mezzogiorno* [south] and to be amongst the people and to listen to the people. The League has brought hope for a better future.⁴⁴⁶

“The true problem that we have,” declared Bossi in a speech, “is that so many people who do not vote for us would if only they understood the Padania, the project.”⁴⁴⁷ The supporters and militants of the Northern League have a higher historical consciousness. Those who do not still support the Northern League lack that consciousness. The party has to work hard to help them regain it: “The problem, is how to clarify them, how to remove their ideologies, their fears, their false consciences, their superstitions. This is the problem.”⁴⁴⁸ The goal of the Northern League, as a revolutionary elite, is to spread the word among the population in order to elevate them from their slumber. For Bossi,

[The self-government of Padania] is also an ethno cultural demand more and more felt by the population which is achieving self-consciousness step-by-step. We know that the origins of a nation are irrefutable religious, cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic homogeneities; but it is above all the self-consciousness of itself, limited at the beginning to some elites and gradually extended to the entire population. In this first phase we find the Padania, whose homogeneity ... is being gradually recognized by the people who as each day goes by understand the colonial mechanism that made them a victim for decades.⁴⁴⁹

The electoral failures of the Northern League are periodically interpreted in terms of lack of conscience or courage. “It is a problem of our people’s maturity,” declared Bossi in a speech “they continue to vote more for continuity than for change. We should not try to find the reason why we do not have the freedom that we want somewhere else, [because] the problem is ours, it’s internal, [to] our peoples who have not yet acquired full conscience.”⁴⁵⁰ In fact for Bossi there has been a process of “brainwashing” for decades by the propaganda of the north’s enemies, which has buried the conscience of its population. One of the earliest and most persistent goals of the party has been the development of its own media in order to stop this perceived brainwashing. “Soon we’ll

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.203.

⁴⁴⁷ “Intervento del Segretario Federale Umberto Bossi,” September 7 1998 in www.leganord.org

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

⁴⁴⁹ Bossi, Umberto, *Il Mio Progetto*, op.cit, p.163.

⁴⁵⁰ “Intervento del Segretario Federale, On. Umberto Bossi Seduta Pontida,” June 4 2000, www.leganord.org

have Padanian television,” observed Bossi once, “We’ll develop information that is no longer a carbon copy of the regime. That way, even those Padani who are still ‘chickens,’ who don’t understand our battle for freedom, can realize what is happening.”⁴⁵¹ “To read our daily newspaper, said Bossi, “is to have self-consciousness, to want the change that our battle represents.”⁴⁵² Those who join the movement refuse the alienation and submission promoted by the regime and, because they are no longer “cowards,” are less prone “to kneel down before the Italian oppression.”⁴⁵³ Society in itself promotes a culture, particularly through the visual media, that encourages passivity and alienation. “Now people seem to be accustomed to the superficial,” says Bossi, “to the image of the politicians, not to the content.”⁴⁵⁴ If they were not brainwashed and alienated, their conscience would rise and they would actively participate in the liberation of the north.

Umberto Bossi uses a metanarrative that reinforces the identity of the Padani as a “chosen group” whose importance assumes world historical proportions. By linking the past with the present, Bossi identifies them as the heirs of a combative tradition of freedom in the north. Bossi further links their activity in the present with a glorious future that will open “a new chapter in history.”⁴⁵⁵ In order to do this the vanguard of the Northern League has had to reach out to the rest of the population. The peoples of the north have been oppressed for such a long time that many of them do not realize their subjugated condition and have forgotten about their true roots. As Bossi declares:

The League aims at the recognition of the inalienable right to self-determination of our peoples. This is an ambitious goal, I recognize that, also because decades of roman slavery have clouded the ability of our people to understand and [the ability] react. We have only one goal that is profoundly different from those of all other parties that have occupied the seats of roman power: We aim at the Padania.⁴⁵⁶

It is up to the vanguard of men and women led by Bossi to take the lead in the battle for liberation and to save the north from the bondage of oppressive and centralist Rome. The goal is to save the community and redeem their peoples from their state of

⁴⁵¹ “Bossi: Un Risoluto blocco padano batterà Roma,” in *La Padania*, July 19, 1998.

⁴⁵² “Il coraggio di cambiare,” in *La Padania*, December 3, 1998.

⁴⁵³ “Umberto Bossi, Intervento al 3 Congresso Federale 1997,” www.leganord.org

⁴⁵⁴ “Il coraggio di cambiare,” *op.cit.*

⁴⁵⁵ Bossi, Umberto, *Vento Dal Nord*, *op.cit.*, p.204.

“enslavement.” The mission of the vanguard is therefore total in the sense that aims at the salvation of a specific group, in this case the communities of the north of Italy.

• The Group is Under Siege

Umberto Bossi has never missed an occasion to stress the fact that due to its disruptive and revolutionary force his movement has been from the very beginning the target of relentless attacks by the forces of Rome. Bossi’s narrative constantly highlights the notion that the vanguard of northerners under his leadership have always been under siege, surrounded by powerful forces determined to destroy them. In his words,

If the delivery [of Lombard League] had been difficult, the childhood of this populist and popular movement was even more complicated. Being a diverse organism of those parties who occupied the State, by this time reduced to a committee of affairs and detached partially or totally from their ideological labels – socialist, Christian, communist, liberal – the League has been from the beginning the target of a furious and encompassing attack. The partitocratic powers and not only those – occasionally some sectors of the Vatican and international finance have contributed – have hurled against this new and democratic political entity ... physical threats, psychological blackmail, economic pressure: nothing has been spared to stop the advance of the first great federalist party of the history of Italy.⁴⁵⁷

Bossi said in a later interview: “Our challenge was unthinkable to the system of the time [which] used all of its weapons to annihilate us, in particular the mass media.”⁴⁵⁸ Both Bossi’s discourse and the narrative of the party assert that the centralist forces of Rome launched two powerful weapons against the advance of the outsider Northern League: electoral reform and the work of the judicial system. “The majority system was made to prevent us from winning,” said Bossi, “With a proportional system we would have all the mayors in the towns of the north.”⁴⁵⁹ At the same time Bossi accuses the judges of the “Clean hands” operation of helping to preserve the old balance of power of the Italian State. The fact that they also accused the League of taking bribes proved that they were

⁴⁵⁶ Bossi, Umberto with Daniele Vimercati, *Processo Alla Lega*, *op.cit.*, p.40.

⁴⁵⁷ Bossi, Umberto, *Tutta La Verità*, *op.cit.* p.114.

⁴⁵⁸ “Bossi: trainiamo il Paese sulla rotta del cambiamento,” in *La Padania*, March 3, 2002.

⁴⁵⁹ “Intervento del Segretario Federale Umberto Bossi,” September 7, 1998, www.leganord.org

interested in undermining the only “true force of change.”⁴⁶⁰ Another episode regularly recounted in the discourse of Bossi and in the party literature is the search conducted in the party headquarters and in houses of militants, by order of a public prosecutor, during the secessionist period of the Northern League. In this period, the regime “put Papalia [the name of the public prosecutor] into action, [who instituted] the trials for freedom of speech, invaded offices and houses of militants and of all of those who were suspected of supporting a democratic secession... all of the machine of the print and electronic journalistic system, all of the famous journalists were put at the service of repression.”⁴⁶¹ In the League’s narrative these episodes are telling examples of the persecutory nature of the Italian State. “As the Hebrews remembered their persecutors,” said Bossi in a speech, “we should not forget any of the crimes perpetrated against the Padani patriots.”⁴⁶² This narrative serves to strengthen the identity of the group as a besieged community surrounded by hostile forces.

The construction of a group identity necessitates a definition of the “other” (what the north is not; what the north is against; the enemies), which plays a steamroller function. Bossi warned that “an impressive alliance was mobilized against the League, composed from a variety of forces and only hostile to each other in appearance.”⁴⁶³ “It is pointless to hide it brothers,” declared Bossi at a rally, “The enemies are many. They are hidden enemies, if they were transparent the enemies would not succeed, the people would win immediately, [the people] would have already won.”⁴⁶⁴ Above all, the enemies of Bossi’s group have always wanted to preserve the centralist and oppressive Roman State at the expenses of the north. As Bossi declared in one of his first writings: “As in all the [historical] periods where the demand for freedom was prominent today the enemy to defeat is the centralism of political power. After the ‘continental centralism of Vienna’, after the ‘nationalist centralism of Fascism’ today it is indispensable to overcome the ‘partitocratic’ centralism.”⁴⁶⁵ The forces that maintain the system are allied in what

⁴⁶⁰ On this point, see *Processo Alla Lega*, *op.cit.*, p.124.

⁴⁶¹ “L’intervento del segretario federale della Lega Nord Umberto Bossi pronunciato a Pontida,” in *La Padania*, May 6, 2003.

⁴⁶² “Intervento del segretario federale,” March 28, 1998, www.leganord.org

⁴⁶³ Bossi, Umberto, *Tutta La Verità*, *op.cit.*, p.177.

⁴⁶⁴ “Intervento del Segretario Federale, On. Umberto Bossi, Venezia,” September 17 2000, in www.leganord.org

⁴⁶⁵ *Lombardia Autonomista*, March 1982.

Bossi calls *Partitocrazia*, “the inextricable bond between the media, big economic groups, and political parties.”⁴⁶⁶ *Partitocrazia* maintained the failed centralistic system that transferred resources from the most dynamic and productive party of the country (the north) to the most backward (the south) creating a culture of dependency in return for electoral support in the south. Through time Bossi has denounced this system and has used different expressions to describe the forces that keep it together. They suffer from “Italian nationalism,” “a violent and antidemocratic monster... born of the necessity of creating the myth of the nation because there was no nation when the Italian State emerged.”⁴⁶⁷ They are followers of a totalitarian belief-system that Bossi calls “the *meridionalista* [southern] ideology, which even becomes a kind of religion.”⁴⁶⁸ Centralism and the political parties and the media and economic groups that support it, have a permanent place on the enemy’s list of the League. The media are always perceived as instruments of the regime. “Big Capital” is still interested in hijacking the productive forces of Italy in order to destroy the small and middle enterprises. The name of the political parties that are enemies of the League may change, depending on the circumstances. *Forza Italia* has changed status several times. The same can be said about the center-left parties. However, at least one group of parties is always singled out as the representatives of a rotten system: the voices of “Rome”, the anti-League.

Another permanent group in the field of enemies of the League are all of those who are perceived as undermining the roots and traditions of the communities of the north of Italy. Although the intensity of anti-immigration sentiment may vary over time and periods, it has always been an issue in the discourse of Umberto Bossi. Particularly in the early-period, anti-southern sentiment helped to consolidate the identity of the group. Southerners were usually described as *terroni*, a pejorative term for people from the south. They were described as agents of the colonization of the north imposed by Rome who brought with them the “laziness” of the south in contrast to the northern enterprising virtues of vigor, drive, and competition. According to Bossi, until World War II,

The ethnic integrity in Lombardy and in almost all of the nations of the north of Italy was preserved. One who really knows our land is aware that entire cities, entire valleys, had not been

⁴⁶⁶ Bossi, Umberto and Daniele Vimercati, *Vento Dal Nord*, *op.cit*, p.103.

⁴⁶⁷ “Patriotism in camicia verde, di Umberto Bossi,” in *La Padania*, March 29, 1998.

⁴⁶⁸ “Meridionalismo nemico,” in *La Padania*, September 8, 1998.

affected by the migratory fluxes ... and what matters most, our work ethic – a curious mixing of Calvinism and Catholic morality – has not been changed, [the work ethic] represents, I think, the shared patrimony, together with individualism, liberal democracy and municipality of our peoples from the north of Italy.⁴⁶⁹

The denunciation of immigration from regions outside of the European Community – the *extracomunitari* – gained increased relevance since the late eighties. As Bossi declared at a rally: “We are tired, tired of being a land of invasion, first from the south and now from the Third World.”⁴⁷⁰ The League was one of the most outspoken voices against the Martelli immigration law of 1990, which it viewed as too soft regarding foreigners and immigrations. “There is no political will to prevent immigration,” observed Bossi,

The goal is to transform our country into a multiracial, multiethnic and multireligious society. We are getting there: we already have one million “legal” immigrants, plus one million who are clandestine. The American model is advancing; we will all live in an immense cosmopolitan metropolis where there will be no trace of the traditions and culture of our people. But I don’t think this should be inevitable... I think we should revolt against this “inevitability,” the multiracial society is closer to hell than paradise.⁴⁷¹

In the late nineties the League also led the campaign against a new immigration law, the *Turco-Napolitano*, proposed by the center-left government. “With the Martelli law, although confusedly, the borders were open,” noted Bossi “With the *Turco-Napolitano*, which we want to cancel, the goal is to construct in a scientific way the aberrant and failed multiracial society.”⁴⁷² To stop the advance of this multiracial society the Northern League, together with its allies in government created a tougher immigration law, called the “Law Bossi-Fini,” that included some ethno-nationalist elements such as the definition of an Italian identity on the basis of ethnic criteria, such as blood ties.⁴⁷³

In this later period the discourse of the Northern League has paid particular attention to Muslim immigration, and has stressed the millenarian struggle between Christianity and Islam. Historical battles are reinterpreted in the light of the increasing Muslim immigration to Europe. For example, the headline of one of the issues of the

⁴⁶⁹ Bossi, Umberto with Daniele Vimercati, *Vento Dal Nord*, *op.cit.*, p.160.

⁴⁷⁰ “Discorso di Pontida,” May 20, 1990.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.148.

⁴⁷² *La Padania*, May 15 1999.

⁴⁷³ Legge Bossi-Fini

party daily was “From Poitiers to the Cruzades and Lepanto, Padania [was] the arm of freedom against Islam.”⁴⁷⁴ Historical figures that distinguish themselves in fighting Islamic forces are brought back to the center stage; for example, the priest Marco D’Aviano who rallied Christian resistance to the Ottoman Turks siege of Vienna in the seventeenth century.⁴⁷⁵ Parliamentarians of the Northern League even drafted a proposal to establish Marco D’Aviano as the “patron saint of Europe.”⁴⁷⁶ The League has been particularly active in its opposition against the construction of mosques in Italy.⁴⁷⁷ The threat of Islamic terrorism has led some members of the party to request the closing of al mosques in the Lombard region. “Until now it has been missing the necessary severity and firmness against these centers of terror,” said one of the officials of the party.⁴⁷⁸ Not surprisingly, in the campaign for the European Elections of 2004 a dominant theme was, as stated in a campaign pamphlet, the “NO to the Islamic invasion”⁴⁷⁹ and the refusal of the entry of Turkey into the European Union. A document of the party for the election emphasized this point further:

Turkey, historically and culturally is not European, she has been in Europe (ottoman military occupation of the Balkans till the siege of Vienna) but it is not Europe ... If it would become a member of the European Union , almost 100 million Turks, in the vast majority Islamic, would automatically obtain European citizenship, electing in this way a number of members of the European Parliament greater than those of Germany.⁴⁸⁰

Also among the enemies of the Northern League are all of those who are said to promote an internationalist ideology that is bent on erasing diversity and imposing a homogeneous way of life on the rest of humanity. Because it threatens to disrupt the roots and traditions of the north of Italy, Bossi targets the international system of globalization as one of the main enemies of the Northern League. This theme has been prominent in the discourse of Bossi particularly since the late eighties. Originally, the criticism of globalization was mostly linked to the criticism of massive immigration and the ideology

⁴⁷⁴ *La Padania*, February 23, 2003.

⁴⁷⁵ On the increasing anti-Islamic rhetoric of the Northern League see, for example, “lo spirito di Lepanto per difendersi dall’ Islam,” in *La Padania*, April 9, 2004.

⁴⁷⁶ “Padre Marco diventi patrono d’Europa,” in *La Padania*, January 15, 2003.

⁴⁷⁷ See, for example, “No a una nuova moschea,” in *La Padania*, May 21, 2004.

⁴⁷⁸ *La Padania*, “Bisogna chiudere tutte le moschee lombarde,” August 4, 2004.

⁴⁷⁹ “Elezioni Europee – Padania-Lega Nord,” May 2004.

of the “melting pot.” As observed by Bossi in 1989, “the multiethnic and multiracial is a society that, by its nature, is against man [and is] destroying the process of ethnic identity.”⁴⁸¹ Gradually, the criticism of globalization evolved into a robust defense of the ethnicity of the populations of the north of Italy. It is a defense of the “natural” ethnicity of the north against the “artificial” order imposed by the globalizers. In the words of Bossi,

Today the capitalist system brings the immigrants here to favor the birth of a multiracial society, of identical men with the same ambitions and without traditions. In sum, the big consumer, fat from hamburgers and drowned in a sea of Coca-Cola. Economic internationalism and Catholic universalism, in a way, speak the same language and aim at the same result: a world society in which all consume the same things and worship the same God. Agnelli [the founder and owner of Fiat] and the pope have the same perspective, both want the multiracial society, because none of them gives any value to the differences ... It is not only an economic problem, [The League] wants to stop globalization and to prevent that everything is made into a product. [That] man is reduced to a thing, always the same, *homo economicus*, without soul and identity.⁴⁸²

For Bossi, the very logic of globalization is rooted in the utopian fervor of the Enlightenment. The globalizers “imagine earthly paradises without noticing that earthly paradises, in practice, turn into hell... we refuse to bend over to the dictatorship of homogenization, to the [dictatorship] of the cancellation of peoples.”⁴⁸³ According to Bossi:

The Enlightenment, that 200 years ago brought rights to men, the possibility of taking into their own hands their own lives, now wants to take [the rights] away. No one can have their own society, their own history; on the contrary, history has ended for the globalizers. In reality there is a mistake in this world turned upside down, because the Enlightenment is not the Western World, but only one of the doctrines of the West which is, besides ideas, made of real things: of peoples, that is, history, men of flesh and bones, that is [the West is made] of us, of our work that is made in our land that is not for sale. The true problem is that behind the ideas there is a system of interests that wants the west to be more virtual than real.⁴⁸⁴

In Bossi’s view, the consistent effort to weaken and dismantle the family as an institution is a crucial part of this full-fledged assault by the globalizers on the true nature of the

⁴⁸⁰ “Programma per le elezioni Europee 2004,” May 2004, in www.leganord.org.

⁴⁸¹ “Discorso di apertura del Congresso della Lega Lombarda,” 8,9,10 February 1989, www.leganord.org

⁴⁸² Bossi, Umberto and Daniele Vimercati, *Processo Alla Lega*, *op.cit.*, pp.13-14

⁴⁸³ Venezia, September 17, 2000 in www.leganord.org

⁴⁸⁴ “Intervento del Segretario Federale” Venezia, September 21, 2003.

peoples. The events of 1968 marked the beginning of the assault and the Northern League was in government to put an end to this attack. As stated by Bossi in an interview:

The iconoclast period, initiated in 68 is ending. [In this period] all the rules were thrown away and modern publicity was born: they used this system to substitute for reality the artificial, the image that creates reality. The world was turned around. The last time there was such a difficult period was with the French revolution, which turned around all the existent rules... these iconoclastic periods are distinguished by the reversal of all the rules, by the unhinging of all traditions. Tradition means family especially. Napoleon used a system to disrupt the family that is still in vigor today: prostitution ... 68 used the same system. Prostitution becomes a model, the last act to destroy the family, bulwark of traditions.⁴⁸⁵

The spreading of pornography is an important component of the supposed planned destruction of the family. If prostitution represents “the sexual alternative to the wife,”⁴⁸⁶ pornography “when it is taken to its extreme is transformed into obvious pedophilia and homosexuality. We will fight until the end against these deviants, from the Left but not exclusive [to the left], who talk about human rights and freedom of expression only to hide their dirty interests.”⁴⁸⁷ Adoption of children by gay couples is rejected on the same basis of defending what is natural against imposed artificialities. “We don’t have anything against homosexuals, anyone is free to do what they want in bed,” declared Bossi at a rally, “However we must be clear [about the fact] that the laws cannot give what nature cannot give. [The League defends] natural families, natural children Against what is corrupt and artificial.”⁴⁸⁸ In the narrative of Bossi the ideologues of internationalism through massive immigration and the disruption of the traditional family use globalization to dilute the roots of centuries-old cultures such as Padania.

The vision of Europe in the discourse of Bossi serves as a proof that the field of enemies of the Northern League is not static but is always evolving. At the beginning, the process of European unification, was seen as a positive development for Padania due to the fact that it seemed to weaken the sovereignty of Nation-States and promote micro-nationalisms across the continent. “Why not substitute the centralism of the unified States

⁴⁸⁵ “Il Ritorno della tradizione,” in *La Padania*, February 2, 2003.

⁴⁸⁶ “Stop privilegi ai magistrati. Siano eletti dai cittadini,” in *La Padania*, May 1, 2002.

⁴⁸⁷ “La Battaglia della Lega Nord contro la prostituzione di strada, la pedofilia e la pornografia,” Segreteria Politica Federale, September 2002, pp.6-7

⁴⁸⁸ “Intervento del Segretario Federale On. Umberto Bossi, Venezia,” September 17, 2000, in *www.leganord.org*

with a more articulate system, characterized by a plurality of institutional sites, each one with its competences?” asked Bossi in the early nineties, adding that this tendency “is already at work with the process of the European unification.”⁴⁸⁹ However, the increased power of a centralized structure in the European Union led the Northern League to an increased hostility toward the European Union. Recently, the League accused the EU of favoring the same “Jacobin” system of globalization, the imposition of an artificial order on peoples:

The legislative excesses of Brussels sometimes can make us laugh, like the standard for the length of peas or carrots. However, behind these things it lays a lethal design for the future and the freedom of peoples: the birth of a European Superstate, according to a Stalinist idea. I call it the Soviet Union of the West and I’m not wrong to define it like that ... we want a confederationist Europe, because without the Nation-State democracy dies. Without States we will have a USSR of the West, dominated by technocrats, and the stateless bureaucracy of Brussels, elected by no one. Democracy is at stake.⁴⁹⁰

Bossi further explained that “there are two distinct models of Europe: the one of the Superstate of a Neo-Jacobin type that we are against, [and] the model of a Union of States which is the model of the peoples, the model of a society balanced between the global and the local.”⁴⁹¹ Bossi has been particularly adamant against European measures such as the EU-wide arrest warrant that, according to him, only demonstrates the dictatorial nature of the European Union. “This arrest warrant makes me think that this Europe is the synthesis between the French Revolution and the Bolshevik Revolution, inventing a European community law that will cancel the residual autonomy of the States,” said Bossi in an interview “It is necessary to oppose this Nazi madness with maximum strength.”⁴⁹² From this perspective, the community of Padani is now the target of a despotic and dangerous European Union.

Old enemies can also become friends. For example, in the Northern League’s first stage the Catholic Church was defined as a natural enemy of the freedom of the north, because it had been colluding with the oppressive centralist forces since the process of unification of the Italian State. The Vatican and the ecclesiastical hierarchies in particular

⁴⁸⁹ Bossi, Umberto and Daniele Vimercati, *Vento Dal Nord*, *op.cit.*, pp.162-3.

⁴⁹⁰ “Bossi: trainiamo il Paese sulla rotta del cambiamento,” *op.cit.*

⁴⁹¹ “Sarà un’Europa dei Popoli,” in *La Padania*, July 2, 2003.

⁴⁹² “L’Intervista di Bossi all’Ansa,” in *La Padania*, October 23, 2003.

were denounced as reactionary forces and enemies of northern liberation. “Catholicism – not Christianity – is at the origins of our evils,” said Bossi “One God, one pope, one king. One, one, one ... Catholic absolutism has created absolutist and anti-democratic states.”⁴⁹³ “Catholicism is a lower sect of Christianity,” said Bossi in another occasion, “that believes that it must have temporal power to in order to take care of the souls.”⁴⁹⁴ The Vatican was also attacked for actively promoting the policies of open borders in order to increase the number of the faithful in the West. However, the discourse of Bossi has gradually come to view the Church and the Pope be in a more positive light, in sync with the League’s gradual emphasis on Christian and traditional values as a response to the dynamics of globalization and the threat of Islamization. To him,

This Pope is a great [man], he is the first [Pope] for one hundred years who does not retreat in front of the masonry and anti-Christian doctrines ... I thought that the Church was over, that had sold out, instead I must recognize that what John Paul II has been doing for a long time is on the side of Man. His defense of the family, of procreation, of values, have been always part of our own battle ... the position of the Pope is commendable, the Church is starting to wake up.⁴⁹⁵

Accordingly, for Bossi there are two models that fight each other in today’s Europe: “The Neo-Jacobin model, of the universal and multiracial society, standardized by the market... and the Christian model of the peoples; of a society balanced between present, future, and past, between local and global, between new forces that put pressure from the outside and historical values rooted in tradition. This is the side of the League.”⁴⁹⁶ In the ongoing battle against Islamization the Northern League does not miss an occasion to remind everyone of the endangered Christian roots of Europe. As stated in the Electoral Program of the Northern League for the European Elections of 2004,

The people of Padania want instead a Europe founded on common values, prime among them, the Christian value: Just when at a global scale Islamic terrorism is manifestating itself, in all the gruesomeness that distinguishes it, it is fundamental to strongly emphasize the identity of Europe, which is founded on that value [Christianity].

⁴⁹³ Bossi, Umberto *Tutta La Verità*, *op.cit.*, p.196.

⁴⁹⁴ “Subito referendum per la Padania libera,” in *Lega Nord-Padania Indipendente*, November 25, 1996.

⁴⁹⁵ “Bossi lo elogia ‘E’un grande Difende l’uomo,” *La Stampa*, February 7, 2000.

⁴⁹⁶ “Intervento del Segretario Federale della Lega Nord pronunciato a Pontida,” May 4, 2003, in *www.leganord.org*

Thus the church was transformed from enemy to friend of the Northern League. But some enemies remain constant. The United States of America has always occupied a place in the group of favorite targets by the Northern League. From the beginning the American, “melting pot” model of society was derided as the antithesis of the ethnic model of society defended by the Northern League. This vision has not changed. One of the most recent official Northern League documents, regarding the issue of immigration, is clear in its rejection of this aspect of American society. “Those who fight to preserve the survival of their nations,” it reads, “represent the field of diversity of cultures, of true tolerance and freedom, while the neo-American multiculturalism represents [the field] of uniformity, rootedness and subjugation.”⁴⁹⁷ “Patriotism,” it continues, “is the last obstacle to the progression of the universal American and Islamic empires.”⁴⁹⁸ In more recent times, particularly since the Northern League became a member of the governmental coalition, the rhetoric against the United States has been somewhat toned down. This was particularly visible during the American intervention and occupation of Iraq. Italy is an ally of the United States, and the reaction of the Northern League and its newspaper to the Iraq war favored the Bush regime. This was radically different in comparison with the Kosovo war of 1999, which was derided as just one more imperialist projection of power and influence. The American model of society and its perceived attempt to export it to the rest of the world, however, remain firmly in the imagination of the Northern League as a mortal enemy.

A powerful device employed by Bossi to increase his followers’ perception of belonging to a community under siege is the pervading use of a logic of conspiracy. For Bossi, powerful enemies, who are regularly portrayed as united in a shadowy network that shelters the anti-League alliance, constantly persecute the vanguard of men and women he leads. The idea of conspiracy becomes a uniting force for the vanguard. The discourse of the leader regularly blames Freemasonry for the evils that afflict the group. The finding of documents from the Masonic Lodge *Propaganda Due* (P2) that alluded to a hegemonic plan to control the Italian State have a central place in the discourse of Bossi as proof of the powerful role that “occult worlds” and “secret societies” play in Italy. In

⁴⁹⁷ “Ragionare sull’ Immigrazione: La Nuova Legge Bossi,” Segreteria Politica Federale, September 2002.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.21

the past he regularly established a link between the plan of P2 and the creation of *Forza Italia* by Silvio Berlusconi. "In the same way as the P2 Lodge" observed Bossi, "the party of Berlusconi is not born, as people say, from the people, from social-political forces that come from below. It [*Forza Italia*] is an invention of powerful men, a creature constructed in a lab, and put forward through the private monopoly of television."⁴⁹⁹ He has accused both Berlusconi and the leader of the National Alliance of "pursuing a similar project to the one of democratic recovery conceived by the Great Master of the P2 Lodge... 'True power resides in the hands of those who hold the mass-media' declared the venerable Gelli, leader of P2, the Masonic lodge of which Berlusconi has the member card no. 1816: these are things that must be remembered! ... The League has opposed this anti-democratic project."⁵⁰⁰ In fact events from the past and present are interpreted in a conspiratorial manner. The hidden hand of the Freemasonry has its fingers everywhere. Explaining the reform of the electoral system, Bossi remembered that "the Masonic logic of the Roman Parliament proposed the change of the electoral system from proportional to majority so that all the parties of the Roman oppression could rally against the League and the freedom of the north."⁵⁰¹ Regarding the attacks of a newspaper against the League, Bossi asserted that "the *Gazzettino* is the front-rank of attack against the League. Behind it are some small businessmen and Masonic milieus that do not want Northern unity and, therefore, try to break the Northern League."⁵⁰²

Of the many occult forces that push the international system of globalization, Bossi highlights Freemasonry's prime role. In fact globalization is essentially a Masonic project aimed at establishing Masonic ideals everywhere. In the view of Bossi:

Mass immigration appeals to Rome because it floods Padania; and by giving immigrants the right to vote it manages to transform Padania into a permanent colony. Moreover, the ideologues of globalization are allied with international bankers ... they want to reduce the man to a microbe, alone in front of globalization, without links, without traditions, without a sense of belonging to a community. In sum, the project of the Masonry: "without family, without house, without God, without religion, without children." You can see very well that behind the law '*turco-napolitano*' is the work of shady figures, well hidden, faraway, but also very close.⁵⁰³

⁴⁹⁹ Bossi, Umberto, *Tutta La Verità*, op.cit, pp.31-32

⁵⁰⁰ Bossi, Umberto, *Il Mio Progetto*, op.cit, pp.91-92

⁵⁰¹ "La bufera sta per arrivare," in *La Padania*, July 23, 1998.

⁵⁰² "Il Gazzettino centrale del meridionalismo," in *La Padania*, September 20, 1998.

⁵⁰³ "Intervista a Umberto Bossi," in *La Padania*, May 15, 1999.

The conspiratorial Masonic nature of globalization is repeatedly pointed out in the discourse of Bossi. As he said in an interview, “Masonry is the instrument through which globalization acts at an ideological-cultural level, in support of economic decisions... The idea of the traditional family, is in radical contrast to the vision of the American Masonry, [it is an obstacle] to the attempt from this octopus to take control of the world through globalization.”⁵⁰⁴ The danger posed by Masonic globalization is eminently spiritual, because “according to the Masons there is a need to destroy the family and to blend religions, so that the only God left, a single God for everyone, is money.”⁵⁰⁵ The project of the European Union has been increasingly regarded as a tool for the Masonic domination of world affairs. An article published in the party daily described in detail the dynamics of Jean Monnet, “Masonic plan”⁵⁰⁷ at the origins of the European Union. The European superstate is usually derided as the “Europe of the Masons.” According to Bossi,

When we took hold of the government of our country the “monster” [the Nice treaty that furthers European integration] was already in flight. The band of the Masons, Amato [former socialist prime-minister] and his ilk, have been already in Nice and it is difficult to stop the “monster” when it is flying ... now we have to stop the “offence of racism” [the European legislation that criminalizes racist comments], which only serves to put those who are opposed to the project of destruction of peoples pushed forward by Masonic fundamentalism in jail.⁵⁰⁸

In the center of the collusion of forces that push globalization in order to destroy humankind as we know it is America. For Bossi, globalization is a tool in the hands of Americans to impose their multicultural model of society on the world. To accomplish this project they use sycophantic European elites, who serve as their lackeys. “Ah America,” observed Bossi, “these masters of ours, where everything is controlled by money ... the diplomacy of the dollar cancels our cultural identity and our historical dignity. European intelligentsia is reduced to identifying the promise land as the rootless

⁵⁰⁴ “Il Piano massonico di Monnet alla base dell’Unione Europea,” *In La Padania*, September 25, 2002.

⁵⁰⁵ “Il corpo humano non è dello stato,” *in La Padania*, February 6, 1999.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ “Il Piano massonico di Monnet alla base dell’Unione Europea,” *In La Padania*, September 25, 2002.

⁵⁰⁸ “Ma il superStato europeo non passerà,” *in La Padania*, October 27, 2002.

civilization on the other side of the ocean.”⁵⁰⁹ Explaining the American project Bossi said,

The design of the masters of the world, those who through international economic power want to create a unique race and thrown the world back to the Middle Ages of the papacy-empire is clear and lethal: [to] destroy the roots of peoples in order to subjugate them politically ... Unfortunately with the fall of the Soviet empire, the winner was not the desire for freedom and democracy but the more terrible face of globalism, under American guidance. In the Middle Ages, the empire of *Acquisgrana* [Holy Roman Empire] dominated, today is the turn of [another empire] whose royal palace is in Washington. America wants to impose its vision of the world: mercantilist, consumerist, and advocate of the disastrous “melting pot,” the multiracial society that has failed everywhere. We Padani, together with so many other peoples, refuse this project of utter cultural and ethnic destruction, in the name of the values of democracy and freedom.⁵¹⁰

Bossi sees the hand of America behind the massive immigration to Europe in the last decades. The goal, he says, is to eradicate ethnic attachments in Europe and, particularly through Islamic immigration, to destabilize Europe in order to weaken its potential economic and political rivalry with the United States. “It is clear,” noted Bossi, “that if the European economy is hit by million of immigrants it will be so overburdened that America can regain again its primacy over the economy. This is their objective.”⁵¹¹ Behind this goal there is the work of “invisible Masonic powers, the Trilateral, the Bilderberg, the tools of the big American bankers.”⁵¹² At the same time, particularly in the nineties, the Northern League denounced the American project of “Islamization” of Europe. The party daily gave great relevance to authors who defended this thesis, particularly the French intellectual Alexandre Del Valle.⁵¹³ For Bossi, the Kosovo war was the result of the economic interests of American corporations and was intended to reinforce the Islamic presence in Europe. According to the Leader of the Northern League,

Obviously, for a long time, Washington has had in mind the creation of an Islamic spine [in Europe] and now they are close to accomplishing this plan ...in putting together all the ‘vertebrae,’ the Americans will create the Muslim ‘spinal column’ that will serve to prevent the

⁵⁰⁹ Bossi, Umberto, *La Lega: 1979-1989*, Editoriale Nord, 1999, p.111.

⁵¹⁰ “Bossi: Un risoluto blocco padano batterà Roma,” in *La Padania*, July 19, 1998.

⁵¹¹ “Padani ed europei,” in *La Padania*, January 21, 1999.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*

⁵¹³ See, for example, “Islam-Stati Uniti, quella strana alleanza,” in *La Padania*, November 26, 1998.

birth of a political Europe ... using the pretext of the expulsion of the Kosovars, Clinton has created the conditions to hide the project of an “Islamic spinal column” [that was] planned by the global corporations from the eyes of the people ... [As part of this plan] corporations want to open Europe to Turkey and all the 170 million Muslims which would annihilate Christianity and above all Catholicism.⁵¹⁴

Bossi says that in Italy the parties of the Left, Big Capital, and the Church have also taken part in the alliance to destroy Europe through their support for relaxed immigration policies. The Left “searches for a new sub-proletariat that can vote for her,” the Church because “tries to fill its empty seminaries with religious people who it now only finds in the Third world,” and the Big Capital “unloads on the citizens the costs of its own development through the immigration from the Third World.”⁵¹⁵ A 2002 Northern League document dedicated to immigration denounces a similar alliance of different forces. It reads,

The orphans of Marxism and of the dictatorship of the proletariat in a *cattocomunista* (catholicism+communism) mix, followers of internationalism, carry on in this way [approving the *turco-napolitano* immigration law], their subtle work of destruction of European civilization using immigration as a picklock and future element of destabilization and chaos; but in their road they have found the Northern League ... the multiracial society is mostly supported by an alliance between the global finance and the international Left, based on common economic and ideological reasons.⁵¹⁶

Time and again the same conspiracy element reappears in the discourse of Bossi. Powerful elites – many times described as “The Illuminati”⁵¹⁷ - work together against the people, hiding their secret plans from them in order to continue their self-serving project of world domination. The conspiracy element increases the Northern League’s self-perception of being surrounded by hostile and evil forces. The hidden hand is larger than life and omnipresent; those who recognize its dark powers must combat it at every step.

In order to increase the mobilization of the group against evil forces Bossi’s rhetoric relies on catastrophic imagery. Here are just a few examples.

⁵¹⁴ “Kosovari vittime anche della Nato,” in *La Padania*, April 7, 1999.

⁵¹⁵ “Discorso di apertura del congresso della Lega Lombarda, on. Umberto Bossi” *op.cit.*

⁵¹⁶ “Ragionare sull’Immigrazione: La Nuova Legge Bossi,” *op.cit.*, pp 11-19.

The centralist state

- “The alternative in Europe and even in the world at this stage, is truly between the explosion of ethnic or racial conflicts and complete federalism.”⁵¹⁸
- “The League is engaged in a fight without truces that can only have one of the following outcomes: or the destruction of the League and the incarceration of its officials starting with the [federal] secretary, or the collapse of the State and the start of a liberal revolution based upon the principles of self-determination.”⁵¹⁹
- “[Federalism] is the only alternative to the system, to the centralist dictatorship. Pay attention citizens who love freedom; if the League lowered down the standard or, even worse, [if the League] disappeared, an abyss would open in front of the peoples of the north.”⁵²⁰

Immigration

- “Be aware that we are facing an apocalyptical invasion, not just a few hundred people. There has been talk about thirteen million of immigrants falling upon us in the next ten years.”⁵²¹
- “Think about what may happen if there are no limits, no confines. The entire world would rain upon our European countries. And this situation will not bring development, will not give benefits, but will lead to the collapse of our society. It will lead to a crash and, therefore, to the end of democracy.”⁵²²

⁵¹⁷ See, for example, “La Lega a difesa dell’identità,” in *La Padania*, September 18, 2001.

⁵¹⁸ “Discorso di apertura del Congresso Della Lega Lombarda, on. Umberto Bossi,” *op.cit*

⁵¹⁹ Bossi, Umberto, with Daniele Vimercati, *Processo Alla Lega*, *op.cit*, p.105.

⁵²⁰ Bossi, Umberto, with Daniele Vimercati, *Vento Dal Nord*, *op.cit*, p.88.

⁵²¹ “Intervista a Bossi,” in *La Padania*, May, 15, 1999.

⁵²² “Mondialismo contro democrazia,” in *La Padania*, January 14, 2001

- "Immigration has to be stopped ... it is at stake our existence, our future ... either we manage to regain the lucidity and the love for our future or we will all be dead."⁵²³

European Union

- "The United States has supported the birth of the Fourth Reich [European Union] because it serves them to start uniting the European States. Afterwards they will open Europe to the Islamists and the French-German axis will find it difficult to maintain the control of the Fourth Reich. [When this happens] only America, 'the chosen people,' will lead the world."⁵²⁴
- "The way the project [the European Union] is emerging should give everyone the creeps. So many peoples, each with a different language, forced to be together by a higher power. Something like this has already happened in history, when the Soviet Union was created, with the results that we all know for democracy."⁵²⁵
- "Regarding Europe we do not want a Neo-Jacobin structure, standardized by the market and disaggregating the nation State ... the Neo-Jacobins masons want to give us a new slavery. But the peoples will not let themselves be crushed and a decisive confrontation will happen."⁵²⁶

Globalization

- "If we don't want man reduced to dust, to a 'microbe' addicted to consumerism and materialism and not in charge of his own future, it is necessary that peoples organize and enter directly into politics."⁵²⁷

⁵²³ "Bossi: fermiamo l'invasione. E' a rischio la nostra esistenza," in *La Padania*, September 29, 2002.

⁵²⁴ "Euro, Europa, Quarto Reich," in *La Padania*, November 28, 1999.

⁵²⁵ "Lega, forza di popolo al governo del paese per il cambiamento," in *La Padania*, December 11, 2001.

⁵²⁶ "Sara un'Europa dei Popoli," in *La Padania*, July 2, 2003.

⁵²⁷ "Parte la riscossa dei popoli," in *La Padania*, November 20, 1998.

- “[Globalization] is an enterprise of massification and worldwide de-personalization that threatens to extinguish ethnic cultures and nations ... it is evident that a system that destroys each cultural past is not a civilization but on the contrary is a system that makes everything the same like the cells of a malign cancer.”⁵²⁸

- “The mystics of the market economy assure us that in the future we will all be richer, but I fear that in the meantime we will be all dead.”⁵²⁹

Bossi’s rhetoric to the besieged community is sustained and permeated by a sense of impending doom, of cataclysmic events in the waiting. It is filled with images of “death,” “destruction,” “collapse,” “extinction,” and “abysmal future,” that suggest a scenario in which the “end of the world” is a strong possibility. The use of biological imagery serves to augment the power of the message of doom. To Bossi, “if the Padania remains in Italy, Padania dies.”⁵³⁰ Many times Bossi associates the enemies that threaten the group with diseases. “Nationalism,” declared Bossi, “is a symptom of a mortal disease.”⁵³¹ “If there’s no democracy,” said Bossi about the situation in Italy, “there’s the diffusion of a mechanism of impunity that affects the elites and then, like a cancer, the entire social body.”⁵³² His images suggest vivid images of degeneration and putrefaction. At one occasion he said, “We are trapped in the cadaver of a society swarming with worms.”⁵³³ A typical manner Bossi describes the destructive affects of globalization on human society is by comparing man to a defenseless “microbe” swept away by forces outside of his control.⁵³⁴

No matter what the subject, a sense of foreboding is present throughout the discourse of Bossi. Subjects such as centralism, the European Union and globalization are described in a way that portends or cataclysmic disasters on the horizon. “What will be the way out?” asked Bossi about the situation of Italy, “The great reform, restoration,

⁵²⁸ “Intervento del Segretario Federale, Venezia,” September 15 2002, *op.cit.*

⁵²⁹ “L’intervento del segretario federale della Lega Nord Umberto Bossi pronunciato a Pontida,” May 4, 2003, *op.cit.*

⁵³⁰ “In Padania sarà rivoluzione,” in *La Padania*, April 28, 1998.

⁵³¹ “Patriotismo in camicia verde,” in *La Padania*, March 29, 1998.

⁵³² Bossi, Umberto, with Daniele Vimercati, *Processo Alla Lega*, , *op.cit.*, p.41

⁵³³ Bossi, Umberto, *La Lega: 1979-1989*, *op.cit.*, pp.119-120

⁵³⁴ See, for example, “Intervista a Umberto Bossi,” in *La Padania*, May 15, 1999.

armed confrontation? I don't know; it has not been decided yet. For now, we from the League have managed to keep the anxiety of change from degenerating towards armed revolution. But at the next crisis what will happen?"⁵³⁵ At another occasion Bossi said, "the time of change has come: it can be like a steady wind that turns the pages of the Italian book or like a storm that will sweep it away."⁵³⁶ Writing about the situation of Padania in Italy, Bossi said that:

When there is not a basis of common historical roots or a common ethno cultural matrix, or when this basis is thin ... then problems arise and there are two solutions: either the State accepts the plurality of regional cultural traditions and makes them contribute to the Nation, in a way that all the cultures contribute in the making of the rules of the system, or [the State] tries to liquidate them, if they let themselves be liquidated.⁵³⁷

"After the fall of the Berlin wall," Bossi declared at a rally, "a new historical phase was opened, simultaneously wonderful and terrible." It was terrible because "the era of 2000 has been opened, full of hopes but also of great unknowns for Italy, which the way it is now is not ready to enter," the new era."⁵³⁸ "Give us this freedom," said Bossi at another occasion, "before it is too late."⁵³⁹ As Bossi stated at a 2002 meeting,

Only a cataclysm provoked by extreme revolutionary violence (as happened in France in 1789 or in Russia in 1917) can extirpate the nomenclature at the roots and open a new historical time. But also, authentic democracy can become a revolutionary force capable of setting off a completely new epoch with federalism. When I'm having serious difficulty advancing federalist reform I will call you to shake the palaces of pharisaic falsity, of aversion against our peoples; I will give you the names of the racists who fake bonhomie and democracy but who, in reality, are against the people, especially our people and its freedom.⁵⁴⁰

Bossi's discourse is aimed toward ultimate ends and "final battles." As he observed: "Today our land is engaged in a mortal battle for independence."⁵⁴¹ This ominous mentality is visible in the way that Bossi interprets globalization and all side effects he sees associated with it. "It is not only federalism that matters," observed Bossi at a rally. "There are epochal changes that we know we must contribute to. It may be a

⁵³⁵ Bossi, Umberto *Tutta La Verità*, *op.cit.*, p.205.

⁵³⁶ "Intervento del Segretario Federale on. Umberto Bossi," March 28, 1998, *op.cit.*

⁵³⁷ "Dio assista la Padania," January 27, 2004 in *www.leganord.org*

⁵³⁸ Bossi, Umberto *Il Mio Progetto*, *op.cit.*, p.30.

⁵³⁹ "Il Senatur stoppa I nazionalisti Verdi," in *La Padania*, March 31, 1998.

⁵⁴⁰ "Intervento del Segretario Federale, Venezia," September 15, 2002, *op.cit.*

question of life and death.”⁵⁴² Because globalization corresponds to an artificial perversion that corrupts the nature of man and society, there is a sense of urgency in stopping this process. “History is not dead,” observed Bossi, “Men will play a role again; but it needs to be soon, because the enemy destroys at a high speed.”⁵⁴³ According to Bossi, “internationalism is losing ground [in this battle] because those who wanted it to win have not managed to cancel the identity of peoples. However to win this battle [the peoples] need to be supported with even more strength.”⁵⁴⁴ The League’s criticism of the European Union is also viewed in terms of a final confrontation between those who favor the “Jacobin and centralist dictatorship,” of a European Superstate, and those who side with a “Europe of the peoples.” The end of this battle will bring either democracy’s death or victory.

• The League’s Exceptionalism

As already implied the discourse of Bossi is characterized by a constant polarization that simplifies realities and focuses his group on what separates the Northern League from its enemies. This polarization is applied either to national or international visions. In the Italian political system the pole of the Northern League (in coalition or not) is always defined as the last resource available against an antagonistic pole where all the other parties and forces are lumped together. Bossi described what was at stake in the national elections of 1994 in the following way: “There is a virtual pole constituted by three groups: the fascists, the Christian democrats and communism. They support the welfare policies that have ruined Italy [and] want a centralized state. Against them is the new, represented by the Northern League.”⁵⁴⁵ In 1998 on one pole was “Italian

⁵⁴¹ Bossi, Umberto and Daniele Vimercati, *Processo Alla Lega*, *op.cit.*, p.45.

⁵⁴² “L’intervento del Segretario Federale della Lega Nord Umberto Bossi pronunciato a Pontida,” May 4, 2003, *op.cit.*

⁵⁴³ “Bossi: no alla dittatura globale,” in *La Padania*, December 2, 1999.

⁵⁴⁴ “Culture locali, antidoto al mondialismo,” in *La Padania*, October 10, 2002.

⁵⁴⁵ “Second Congress of Lega Nord, Intervento di chiusura del Segretario Federale on. Umberto Bossi,” December 11,12 1993

nationalism,” representing the old forces of centralism: the Vatican, the parties of the left, the former neo-fascist National Alliance, the big financiers, and the Mafia. They incarnated the centuries old forces of centralism. On the opposite pole was the “Padani patriotism” of the Northern League, constituted by those who “have united their forces to fight the beautiful battle of freedom.”⁵⁴⁶ In 2002, Bossi saw the political system divided in two blocks: “The block that we represent is indeed ‘small enterprises,’ federalism, the power that comes from below [the people]. It is very different from the [other] block, ‘Left, Big Capital.’”⁵⁴⁷

This polarizing technique can also be seen in the way Bossi describes the function and role of the Northern League in the international system. The European Union is always described in an either-or manner. “We have to ask ourselves,” said Bossi at a rally, “what kind of Europe we want: the one of the peoples, that we defend, or the one wanted by the Jacobins, where some thirty so-called illuminati want to command 360 million citizens imposing them a unique model.”⁵⁴⁸ Bossi sees the struggle against the international system of globalization in a similar manner: “Enterprises, peoples, identity against virtual finance and rootlessness ... these are the terms of the political dialectic that is progressing. One time in Europe it was Atheism against Christianity, now it is materialism against identity.”⁵⁴⁹ In Bossi’s discourse the League is always portrayed as being on one side of the spectrum while all the others are lumped in an opposite, hostile side – including Americans and Muslims, capitalists and communists.

At the same time this use of polarization reinforces the group’s self-perception of the Northern League as a unique movement, an exceptional force different from all the others. In the discourse of Bossi, the League is the *only* movement that the peoples of the north can look to when they feel their cultural and ethnical traditions in jeopardy. The vanguard of men and women led by Bossi is the only hope for the north. As Bossi stated at a rally,

We have defeated the centralist counterrevolution because we [unlike all the other political forces] are not [founded] in a palace feud but are a force of nature that has shattered the basis of

⁵⁴⁶ “Intervento del Segretario Federale On. Umberto Bossi,” March 28 1998, *op.cit.*

⁵⁴⁷ “Questo sciopero è contro I giovani,” in *La Padania*, April 16, 2002.

⁵⁴⁸ “La Lega a difesa dell’ identità,” in *La Padania*, September 18, 2001.

⁵⁴⁹ “Bossi: made in Padania o muore la nostra storia,” *op.cit.*

partitocrazia and influenced the political life of the last twenty years. The League uses power to put ideas capable of transforming society in place ... without us our land would be without identity, [it would be a land] plowed by invaders.⁵⁵⁰

Not surprisingly, for Bossi “the vote for the League has more value than other votes [for other parties]. The League has the honesty and the courage to transform in projects the ideas of the people. With the League politics is indeed the only instrument that the people have in order to matter.”⁵⁵¹

I have so far attempted to show how, through his discourse, Bossi strengthens the identity of his group which is characterized as a vanguard of men and women who are conscious of their history and under siege by powerful and demonized enemies. Bossi’s use of conspiracy, catastrophic imagery, and repeated polarization serves to mobilize and increase the focus of the group; the mission of defending the north from those hostile forces – be it the dictatorship of centralism or the tyrannies of the European Union and globalization – rests on the shoulders of the vanguard elite who are engaged in a final battle and, therefore, are the last hope of the peoples of the north of Italy. In my next segment I will demonstrate how the discourse of the Northern League Bossi idolizes Bossi as a savior and messianic guide of the vanguard mission to save the communities of northern Italy.

⁵⁵⁰ “Federalismo oppure morte,” in *La Padania*, June 25, 2002.

⁵⁵¹ “Lega, il motore del cambiamento,” in *La Padania*, May 5, 2002.

3. Bossi The Savior

3.1 The Bossi Industry

Since the early days of the Lombard League and on through its solidification in the Italian political and social landscape, the official literature of the party, coupled with the narrative of the leader himself and his strong personalized hold on the party have contributed to a process of mythification of Umberto Bossi. I refer to this process as the “Bossi industry. To outline this industry, I will first look at the role played the inner circle in mythologizing the figure of Bossi. This includes reviewing party literature, interviews and public interventions by Bossi’s closest collaborators, parliamentarians, or those who occupy public offices as members of the party.

• The Inner Circle

Bossi’s inner circle goes to great lengths to emphasize the role played by the leader in the formation and development of the party. The successes of the Northern League – and its ancestor, the Lombard League – are characterized above all as the work of Bossi. The preface to a compilation of writings by Bossi about the history of the Northern League, written by the director of *La Padania*, offers a good example of lionization of the leader among the party faithful:

This tale, if seen in its totality and slow fluidity, manifests all the characteristics of an extraordinary authenticity. Because, without hiding torments and mistakes, it outlines first hand the faithful itinerary of a lonely intuition [of Bossi’s] that becomes, step by step, a valuation of local culture and therefore an ideal of liberation till it expands to an identification with a full-fledged political project.⁵⁵²

⁵⁵² Baiocchi, Giuseppe, “Preface,” in Bossi, Umberto, *La Lega: 1979:1989*, *op.cit*, p.6.

Christina Malaguti and Stefania Piazzo, describe the early days of the movement in the following manner: “In this way, the strength of an idea, [and] the genius of a man became the idea and the strength of all the peoples of the north, in a ‘ferment of recovery and revival’”⁵⁵³ As asserted by a contributor (under the pseudonym *Camisa Verde*), to the party daily, the advent of the Northern League represented “a formidable union of freemen launched with determination by Umberto Bossi to gain the independence of their lands.”⁵⁵⁴ And another contributor writes: “Umberto Bossi [is] the father-brother ... father of a movement created for us and brother in all the battles, victories, and defeats.”⁵⁵⁵ Roberto Maroni, long time party official, emphasized the indispensable role played by Umberto Bossi, saying that “At the beginning, in the League, it was practically only Umberto Bossi who had ideas. Without him we wouldn’t even exist, because a movement that hasn’t tradition, a common history cannot survive without a strong leadership.”⁵⁵⁶

This trailblazing function of Umberto Bossi in the early days of the movement is commonly stressed. “[The militants] must remember the immense debt of recognition,” said Senator Pagliarini, “that all of us have and always will have towards Umberto Bossi and those few people that had the courage of founding the movement and the strength to make it grow, against everyone.”⁵⁵⁷ According to Giuseppe Leoni, founder of the Lombard League together with Bossi, its enemies knew of the primal role of Bossi for the movement, which is why they concentrated their attacks on him. As Leoni wrote in the party organ of the eighties,

[These attacks] are naturally focused against senator Bossi, National Secretary of the Lombard League, because he represents the turning key of our movement. However, the end result of these attacks had the opposite reaction hoped for by the perpetrators: [The attacks] have contributed to bind instead of separate the militants of the movement around their *great leader* [sic] who because of his capacity, determination culture and also because of his honesty and unselfish idealism has few equals.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵³ “Una voce per la libertà,” *Lega Nord-Padania Indipendente*, December 9, 1996.

⁵⁵⁴ “Attenzione al ‘Divide et impera,’” in *La Padania*, April 28, 1998.

⁵⁵⁵ “Varese, Congresso della chiarezza,” in *La Padania*, July 27, 1999.

⁵⁵⁶ “Come la vedo io, di Roberto Maroni,” in Pajetta, Giovanna, *Il grande camaleonte*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1994, p.143.

⁵⁵⁷ Caravita, Federico, *Lega Nord: Storia Fotografica*, Edicart, 1993, p.54.

⁵⁵⁸ *Lombardia Autonomista*, num.3, 1988

In the testimony of those close to the leader he is a man of a spellbinding personality. "From the first time that I listened to him," remembered the parliamentarian Elisabetta Bertotti, "all my doubts ceased to exist. I sleep two hours at night, I dedicate all my time to the League."⁵⁵⁹ "What impression has he made on me?" asked Maroni, "[That of] a man of a very strong personality, fascinating. We could listen to him for hours without getting bored. He was prepared [to discuss] any subject."⁵⁶⁰ Maroni puts the "bewitching" power of Bossi's personality at the center of the group. In his words,

We were all bewitched more by this great personality than by the project. He was a sort of Hindu Holy Man who enchanted not so much by what he said but by what he did, because Bossi knew how to be always in the frontline, the general that guides the assault with the bayonets... I have been in the League for so many years because of this strange, unusual relationship that tied all of us to Bossi, almost like a psychological hook that forced you to put part of your time committed to this insane, unachievable project.⁵⁶¹

Franco Rocchetta, one time president of the Northern League, noted that one of the determining factors of the party was that it was led by a "man with a strong, exceptional personality."⁵⁶² Long time loyalist Giovanni Meo Zilio sees the spellbinding nature of Bossi as the driving force of the Northern League. As he wrote in *La Padania*,

We should ask ourselves why it is that the League, notwithstanding everything [schisms, mistakes] survives. As always in political phenomena, and in human phenomena in general, the reason is not univocal, but rests on the conflation of factors. However there are prevalent factors. In this case it is general opinion that that prevalent factor, even determinant, *rests on the personal charisma of the leader* [my italics] ... [Which] represents an emblematic case in the recent history of our politicians and would deserve to be studied by political scientists and experts in political psychology. The fact is that Bossi, independent of his stature as a statesman (with all its lights and shadows: in truth more lights than shadows) not only drags masses along with him and is the only political man that manages today to summon 50.000 people, but also exerts "political fascination" even on us, men of science used to critical evaluation, objectivity, reality. This is a very telling thing.⁵⁶³

In the eyes of his acolytes, Bossi is relentlessly described as a unique man and an avatar with rare qualities. Among those qualities praised by those close to him is his clairvoyance. He is regularly depicted as someone who sheds light unto the group, the

⁵⁵⁹ Ottaviani, Achille and Raffaello Canteri, *I cento giorni della Lega*, Euronobel, 1992, p.15.

⁵⁶⁰ Zanzi, Carlo, *Maroni L'Arciere*, Lativa, 1994 pp.47-48

⁵⁶¹ "Come la vedo io, di Roberto Maroni," *op.cit.*, p.144.

⁵⁶² Canteri, Raffaello and Achille Ottaviani, *op.cit.*, p.25.

person who can see what others cannot. Current events are interpreted as a proof of Bossi's prophetic ability. According to senator Carlo Pisati, "Bossi, long before the fall of the Berlin, had foreseen everything and said that left and right were dead, and that the Christian Democrats would follow communism in its fall."⁵⁶⁴ In the view of one of the national secretaries of the Northern League, "It is enough to read what Bossi said five, six, seven years ago. We find exactly everything that is happening today. You don't believe it? Go and check it."⁵⁶⁵ Roberto Cota, one of the national secretaries of the Northern League, noted that "more than seven years ago some accused Bossi of lunacy, saying that federalism in Italy was impossible. Today no one has the courage anymore to call himself anti-federalist."⁵⁶⁶ In an interview with *La Padania* Leoni hints at an almost supernatural capacity of Bossi to predict events as he reflects about "the confine that exists between the free will of man and Providence, which makes impossible paths feasible. I'm thinking about my battles alongside Umberto, when I was beside him from the birth of the League, and the goals reached [by Bossi] with strategy, anticipating all the signs of the political world."⁵⁶⁷

Bossi is repeatedly portrayed as a man with rare foresight. Official documents of the Northern League emphasize this quality. One party biography refers to Bossi's "formidable political intuition" in the eighties when he "understood that the first thing to do was to initiate a fight without mercy to combat the political situation."⁵⁶⁸ Bossi, "intuited very early that a solely ethnic claim would not have led to concrete results."⁵⁶⁹ "Suffice to say," the same document states, "that one more time Bossi foretells the political turn that the League must undertake."⁵⁷⁰ In the words of Senator Staglieno, "[The project of] federalism is the future of Europe and, I would say, of the entire world. This has been the splendid intuition of Bossi, who has updated the federalist doctrine of Cattaneo."⁵⁷¹ According to *camisa verde*, "our leader is not right *a priori* [but] the facts

⁵⁶³ "La Lega contro la globalizzazione," in *La Padania*, January 4, 2000.

⁵⁶⁴ In Canteri, Raffaello, and Achille Ottaviani, *op.cit.*, p.37.

⁵⁶⁵ "E ci davano dei razzisti," in *La Padania*, December 6, 2000.

⁵⁶⁶ "Cota: Festeggiamo un giorno che ha cambiato la storia," in *La Padania*, September 17, 2002.

⁵⁶⁷ "Leoni: figuriamoci se gliele darà vinta," in *La Padania*, March 14, 2004.

⁵⁶⁸ *La Vera Storia della Lega Nord; Federalismo e Liberta, Dalle Origini ad Oggi*, Ufficio Elettorale Federale, 1998, p.29.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.32.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.49.

⁵⁷¹ Canteri, Raffaello and Achille Ottaviani, *op.cit.*, p.52.

tells us that he has never made a mistake. Thank goodness, because if it depended on some of us, the Padania would remain an unachievable mirage.”⁵⁷²

Unlike all other “self-serving” and elitist politicians the leader of the Northern League is heralded as someone who understands and serves the true interests of the people because he comes from the people. “His human qualities, above all the fact that he is someone from the people, and is not a politician like the others,” notes one of his collaborators Filippo Pozzi, “serve as an example for the people of Padania who reclaim the freedom to decide their future without the intrusion of the Roman palaces.” He added, “He speaks with the language of the people, not [the language] from the palaces.”⁵⁷³ Giancarlo Giorgetti, the National Secretary of the Lombard League emphasizes the popular nature of Bossi as a crucial element of his relationship with the militants: “Party militants see him as truly being one of the people. He has a very informal style and avoids being perceived as a man of power.” For Giorgetti, “he speaks the language of the people, to the people, about the problems faced by the people.”⁵⁷⁴

Therefore it is not strange that Bossi is perceived as someone who has always honored his duty to fight for the people and has never been in politics for personal gain or naked ambition. “He doesn’t think about power [for the sake of power],” noted the Director of *La Padania* Gigi Moncalvo, “his goal is not to seat in comfortable armchairs, but to fight for the dignity and the pride of his people, against Rome.” To Moncalvo, “he has always showed and continues to show that honesty and honest words are the most important thing for a political man, for a representative of the people.”⁵⁷⁵

There is a natural tendency of the party’s inner core to associate Bossi with the Northern League itself. Particularly in times of crisis, especially those due to internal schisms or electoral defeats, Bossi is hailed as both the incarnation of the party and the only leader that can point the way out of the crisis. In 1993, after the League was hit by accusations of corruption and internal dissension, longtime loyalist Giuseppe Babbini declared in an interview that “The League is Bossi. Bossi is the only leader: there’s no one else. Lord forgive me, but I feel like saying the following: There will not be another

⁵⁷² “Padani, ci vuole coraggio,” in *La Padania*, April 8, 1998.

⁵⁷³ Filippo Pozzi, Segretario Politica Federale, Interview with the author, May 13, 2004.

⁵⁷⁴ Giancarlo Giorgetti, Lega Lombarda, Interview with the author, May 19, 2004.

⁵⁷⁵ Gigi Moncalvo, Direttore La Padania, Interview with the author, May 31, 2004.

Bossi outside of me.”⁵⁷⁶ In that period, the parliamentary group of the Northern League made known its loyalty to Bossi by this press release:

If anyone believes that Umberto Bossi does not still represent the genius-like and unquestioned leader of the League in the fight for the triumph of a fulfilled democracy, a State of rights and federalism, it is better that they disillusion themselves immediately... [T]he sword of Alberto da Giussano is firmly in the hands of Bossi, and the armies of the *Carroccio* are united today as they were yesterday, and more.⁵⁷⁷

The inner core’s testimony that Bossi is the personalization of the party and its goals is repeated over and over. During a period of internal divisions and erosion of electoral support in 1999, another wave of declarations of faith in the leader emerged. Stefano Stefani, then president of the Northern League, declared that “Bossi represents and incarnates the project of the Northern League, for which our Movement was born and has fought for years.”⁵⁷⁸ Another member of the League apparatus noted that “if the Senator [Bossi] leaves, the League will fragment into pieces in ten days.”⁵⁷⁹ After the disappointing results of the party in the national elections of 2001 a longtime official of the Northern League, Senator Tabladini, proposed the creation of a “Reformed League.” Although very critical, he did not cast Bossi’s primacy under doubt. And his proposal specifically stated that “the figure of Bossi is not under discussion, not so much because he hasn’t made mistakes but because [he is] the only glue powerful enough to prevent the dissolution of the party in one week.”⁵⁸⁰ In the account of his acolytes, Bossi is many times depicted not only as someone who is the face of the party but also as a leader who *is* the Northern League.

In the narrative put forward by those close to him, the leader emerges as someone who will leave an indelible mark in history. Bossi belongs to the category of “Great Men.” In a photo book dedicated to the early years of the Northern League, a full page picture of Bossi is subtitled with the following caption: “The true director of the political revolution of the last years in Italy. He hasn’t finished yet.”⁵⁸¹ To a local official of the

⁵⁷⁶ “I veleni vengono da fuori, La gente sta con il Capo,” in *Il Corriere della Sera*, December 11, 1993.

⁵⁷⁷ “Miglio: il Carroccio è frastornato,” in *Il Corriere Della Sera*, December 11, 1993.

⁵⁷⁸ “Stefano Stefani: ‘Il Senatur incarna il progetto leghista,’” in *La Padania*, June 23, 1999.

⁵⁷⁹ “Umberto, pichia duro contro Roma,” in *La Padania*, July 2, 1999.

⁵⁸⁰ Tabladini, Francesco, *Bossi: La grande illusione*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 2003, p.19.

⁵⁸¹ Caravita, Federico, *op.cit.* p.201.

Northern League, “Bossi is one of those men who write the story of a country, a true charismatic leader. Everyone recognizes it, even from other parties.”⁵⁸² In the writings of long time party official Giovanni Meo Zilio, Bossi is hailed as one of those uncommon leaders destined to a permanent place in history as a hero:

Umberto cannot be regarded as a normal man. But a “monster” (in the etymological sense), in the same way that all of those who left a mark in history were monsters ... characters who feel that they bear an imperative and ineludible mission, to which they dedicate their lives in a superhuman manner, with a perseverance that is so opposed to the philosophy of ‘quietism’ that should be defined as “heroic.” They don’t withdraw in the face of obstacles, they don’t know physical tiredness, and they are above all ‘ruthless’ with themselves, refusing relaxation, comfort and wealth. [The leader gives] everything in order to achieve the ideal, for which the leader of the League has declared more than once (and he was not kidding) he was ready to pay, if necessary, the ultimate price. When we hear him repeating that the League ‘is a force that breaks from nature’ we cannot avoid thinking that, first of all, the force that broke out of nature was him; and that it is the League that grows in [Bossi’s] “image and similarity.”⁵⁸³

Followers acclaim Bossi as a visionary committed in a missionary manner to a project that will transform history. “There are men to whom we owe the changing of our way of imagining the world,” writes *La Padania*, “one of those men is certainly Umberto Bossi.”⁵⁸⁴ “Umberto Bossi is the only, truly, enlightened political man that Europe has had in the last three centuries,” noted long time friend and colleague Erminio Boso, who placed Bossi, “side by side with Cavour, Metternich, Churchill, De Gaulle.”⁵⁸⁵ One-time parliamentarian Simonetta Faverio sees in Bossi the harbinger of “a revolution of poets”: Bossi set off “a revolution of great dreamers. And the greatest dreamers are those who fulfill their dreams, or at least they try hard with all their strengths.”⁵⁸⁶ Paolo Grimoldi, the Federal Coordinator of the Padania Youth, stresses the missionary commitment of Bossi to his project as an important aspect of his appeal. “Umberto Bossi is important for several reasons,” he says in an interview, “above all by his clear political ability. But it is not only political; [It is] charisma, constant presence in the territories [of Padania],

⁵⁸² Luca Zaia, Presidente Provincia di Treviso, in *La Padania*, “Fatto del giorno,” June 2, 2004.

⁵⁸³ “Bossi ha il carisma di Garibaldi,” in *La Padania*, December 12, 2000.

⁵⁸⁴ “Bossi: possono anche fermarci, ma ormai il cambiamento è un passaggio irreversibile,” in *La Padania*, March 16, 2004.

⁵⁸⁵ In Negri, Sabina, *Secessione, viaggio nel Nord inquieto*, Foedus Editore, 1996.

⁵⁸⁶ “Sarà la storia a fare giustizia,” in *La Padania*, September 23, 1998.

personal sacrifice, perseverance.”⁵⁸⁷ Giovanni Meo Zilio expresses a similar view that “the psychophysical strength, the idealistic tension and the objective charisma of the Senator can be connected, *mutatis mutandis*, (but the fabric is the same) to those of [Garibaldi] and so many other ‘monsters’ in a positive way.”⁵⁸⁸ As we can see in the narrative of the leader’s inner circle, Bossi is relentlessly portrayed as someone with the missionizing, charismatic qualities necessary to save the north of Italy and create a new reality. To the inner circle, these qualities testify to the Salvationist nature of the leader.

• The Leader’s Discourse

Umberto Bossi’s own discourse also plays a powerful role in the development and consolidation of images that portray him as a missionizing and savior figure. Whether in books, speeches, or public interventions, Bossi assumes a prime position as the sole guide of the vanguard. Bossi repeatedly emphasizes the fact that the movement is in essence the fruit of his missionary commitment and vision. He regularly traces back the origins of his calling to the meeting with the autonomist Bruno Salvadori. Using a religious analogy, Bossi noted in one of his books,

I thought I was on my way to a good professional career when Salvadori opened a new world in front of my eyes, made of political and social commitment in the service of a great idea. For me it was like ending up on the road to Damascus: Something had released the complex of the apostle in me.⁵⁸⁹

In Bossi’s personal discourse the creation and development of his movement take the shape of a quest in which he himself plays the role of the heroic leader. In a compelling example of missionizing rhetoric, he writes:

Fifteen years ago, in the heartland of Lombardy, something happened that recalls the sagas of Brittany. A fairytale began: a man of the people has extracted the sword from the rock and used it to defeat adversaries that looked invincible. In the open field the League has always triumphed...

⁵⁸⁷ Paolo Grimoldi, Interview, April 14, 2004.

⁵⁸⁸ “Bossi ha il carisma di Garibaldi,” *op.cit.*

⁵⁸⁹ Bossi, Umberto with Daniele Vimercati, *La Rivoluzione*, *op.cit.*, p.87.

at the end of the battle, in any case, the blade will return to the rock. And the man who had gripped it, who is a man of the people, will return to the people.⁵⁹⁰

Bossi always identifies fervor for the cause as the driving force for his entrance into politics. He always portrays his motives as profoundly unselfish and pure. In his own account power is not an end in itself. It only matters as long as it is a means to an end: the cause, the ideal. As he observed,

I'm not ambitious. I feel like a father who helps his son [the League] to grow. If a father is a good one, after having brought up his son he goes to the sidelines and lets him walk by himself, with his own legs. I will do the same with the movement: when it will be in a position to walk by itself, I will retire. Power only interests me only if it serves the cause.⁵⁹¹

Bossi's self-representation as a leader who is driven not by a thirst for power but by a grand ideal is a permanent feature of his rhetoric. He has always expressed his willingness to step down as leader as a "proof" of his unselfishness. "Power does not interest me," he said in an interview in 1993, "when I was elected I signed my resignation and put it in a safe. Whoever wants it can present himself to the League, and I'll be ready to be an infantry soldier."⁵⁹² In 2003, while minister of reforms of the Italian government he expressed a similar sentiment: "I have never wanted and I don't want to make a career. I have decided to be the minister not as an end but as a means: to make reforms, to change things."⁵⁹³

At the same time, due to the fact that in his discourse the League is above all his creation, Bossi expresses a sense that he is entitled to decide its destiny. "I am the League," he said in an interview, "the league is a gigantic machine that I operate, nobody else."⁵⁹⁴ Bossi has remarked that he "created it [the League] from nothing, I had to provide for everything: recruitment, organization, and also the political platform."⁵⁹⁵ As noted by Bossi, "I founded the movement, I have watched it grow, and I know all the officials."⁵⁹⁶ Bossi repeatedly juxtaposes his biography with the biography of the

⁵⁹⁰ Bossi, Umberto, *Tutta La Verità*, op.cit, p.208.

⁵⁹¹ Vimercati, Daniele, *I Lombardi Alla Nuova Crociata*, Mursia, Milano, 1990, p.118.

⁵⁹² "Bossi: potremo aprire al polo moderato," in *Il Corriere della Sera*, December 3, 1993.

⁵⁹³ "Fermarli o Morire," in *La Padania*, June 18, 2003.

⁵⁹⁴ "Senza di noi, sarebbe Guerra civile," in *La Repubblica*, March 18, 1993.

⁵⁹⁵ Bossi, Umberto with Daniele Vimercati, *La Rivoluzione*, op.cit, pp.16-17.

⁵⁹⁶ Bossi, Umberto with Daniele Vimercati, *Processo alla Lega*, op.cit. p.106.

movement. They are one and the same. As he wrote in the preface for a compilation of his writings:

The League and its Secretary have not changed, they have just grown in the conscience of the people, and they have given birth, with hard work but also with joy, to the first true political class of the North. This book tells, without mediation, through original documents and therefore incontrovertibly, the story of a long political march. If one day, many years from now, an historian wants to know how the idea of Padania was born, he will have in this book a useful tool.⁵⁹⁷

Bossi also portrays himself as someone who has the necessary qualities to lead the vanguard. To underscore his uniqueness as a politician who is driven not by mundane motives like personal wealth or prestige and is therefore free of self-interest, Bossi casts himself as a simple person, with everyman qualities. His discourse emphasizes the unpretentiousness of his life. In 1990 he said:

I did not become rich, I have not taken any advantage from my political life. I could have sold myself for a good price, that's for sure. I have not done it and I will never will. I still live in the periphery of Varese, with my wife and son, in a two-floor apartment. I drive an old Citroen. I'm usually dressed in the same old clothes. I earn almost ten million as a parliamentarian, but I give half to the League.⁵⁹⁸

At another occasion Bossi commented on the fact that "my house is very modest, [a typical] working class house."⁵⁹⁹ "I am someone who comes from the people and to the people I will return," he noted in an interview.⁶⁰⁰ In order to emphasize his popular image and the gap between the League and the other political parties, Bossi has always prided himself in speaking in everyday plain language. Particularly at the beginning, the political discourse of the League was a direct rejection of *politichese*, the "political cant" of the other parties, which was full of grandiloquence, euphemisms, and abstractions that were totally unintelligible to the average citizen.⁶⁰¹ Therefore, as a man of the people, Bossi swears and is not inhibited about casting himself as a macho man, especially through the

⁵⁹⁷ Bossi, Umberto, *Il Mio Progetto*, op.cit, p.XI.

⁵⁹⁸ Vimercati, Umberto, op.cit, p.118.

⁵⁹⁹ Bossi, Umberto, *Tutta la Verità*, op.cit, p.198.

⁶⁰⁰ "E il leader Lombard: al congresso chiederò carta bianca per il federalismo," *Il Corriere della Sera*, December 7, 1993.

⁶⁰¹ On this matter see, McCarthy, "Italy a new language for a new politics," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, Vol.2, No.3, fall 1997.

use of sexual references. This sexist attitude became part of the identity of the party - usually referred to as *celodurismo* - after Bossi's intervention at the conclusion of the First Congress of the Northern League, when he yelled that "the political parties will not cheat us because *la Lega Ce l'ha duro!* [The League has a hard on!]" In an interview he jokingly said that his announcement "increased the popularity of the *Lega* among the female voters."⁶⁰² At another occasion, when a female socialist politician accused the League of getting ready for an armed secession Bossi, at a political rally, told the "*cara bonassa* [dear hottie]" not to worry. The only weapons that the League had, said Bossi, while making the gesture of an erection, were "the *manico* [broomstick]"⁶⁰³ "In order to make revolutions," he said at another meeting, "We need to have the balls and not to let ourselves be influenced by the opinionated."⁶⁰⁴ Such vulgar language has been a permanent feature of "tell-it-like-it-is" populist style of communication adopted by Bossi early on.

In his discourse the Northern League appears as a reflection of the populism of its leader. The party is unrelentingly characterized as being "of the people, and for the people."⁶⁰⁵ Bossi has compared the League to the Greek mythical figure of Antaeus, "a giant who drew his immense force from the earth, because the earth was his mother. In the same way the explosive charge of the League comes from below, because [the League] takes its strength from popular sovereignty, of which it is the most direct and qualified interpreter."⁶⁰⁶ The League is "an authentic popular and revolutionary force [that works for] the advent of a federalist democracy. We don't fear the people because we are their tool!"⁶⁰⁷

Intimately linked with the popular nature of the party is the depiction of its discourse as an extension of common sense, of what is self-evident. In an interview Bossi assailed the elites for being purposefully aloof from the people. "Those beautiful types," said Bossi, "say that we speak a language [that is spoken] in taverns. They don't know the compliment they pay us for saying that! Because we say the things that the people

⁶⁰² Bossi, Umberto and Daniele Vimercati, *op.cit.*, p.70.

⁶⁰³ Iacopini, Roberto and Stefania Bianchi, *La Lega ce l'ha crudo!*, Mursia, Milano, 1994, p.54.

⁶⁰⁴ "Bossi: un patto tra Padani," in *La Padania*, April 21, 1998.

⁶⁰⁵ "Discorso del Segretario Federale on. Bossi, al II Congresso Federale della Lega Nord," February 1994, www.leganord.org

⁶⁰⁶ *Lombardia Autonomista*, May 1992.

think, we are on the side of the people.”⁶⁰⁸ Whether in opposition or in power, Bossi’s emphasis on the intrinsic “common sense” of the party remains unchanged. The way Umberto Bossi explains the League’s opposition to what he calls “immigration-invasion” exemplifies his populist approach. “We are in government to stimulate,” he said in an interview, “We are a popular party, and we go around holding rallies to listen to the people. And when the people see the arrival of thousands of immigrants, all at the same time, *si incazza* [they get mad].” The solution of this situation is not related “to money, it is about having the balls to do it, which is a different thing.”⁶⁰⁹ In another interview Bossi declared,

The people don’t want millions of illegal immigrants – you just have to walk around to know what the citizens think. It is a very simple thing, just listen... I am a leader and in general a leader must mediate; however, a leader cannot betray the people, therefore he must be able to make the voice of the people heard inside the palace. That is why, once in a while, the voice [of the people] must be raised [by Bossi].⁶¹⁰

Bossi presents himself as the medium through which the people speak. But they often do not know what to say since their native good judgment has been anesthetized and undermined for years by the unrelenting propaganda of the enemies of the people. That is why the vanguard led by Bossi has the role of reminding the people of its roots. As noted before, the vanguard plays the role of vigilantes protecting the natural identity of the people. The League, Bossi vowed, “must commit itself to reminding the people Padani of their history and how their slavery started, not by the work of the Romans, but by ourselves.”⁶¹¹

Among the necessary qualities that Bossi claims to have in order to lead the group, his power of prescience, which I discussed previously in relation to his inner circle, occupies a central role. In his own narrative different events are constantly interpreted as evidence of his clairvoyance. According to him, he understood the path of history long before others. “[And] this is a discovery that goes back many years ago,” said Bossi, “even before international events showed how right my intuition was, we can

⁶⁰⁷ “Intervento del Segretario Federale della Lega Nord, Pontida,” May 4, 2003, www.leganord.org

⁶⁰⁸ “Sarà un’ Europa dei Popoli,” in *La Padania*, July 2, 2003.

⁶⁰⁹ “Bossi: I buonisti stiano attenti,” in *La Padania*, June 27, 2003.

⁶¹⁰ “Fermarli o Morire,” in *La Padania*, June 18, 2003.

say that the pendulum of history, after having moved for more than a century in the direction of justice, has inverted its oscillation and now moves towards the pole of freedom.”⁶¹² As he stated in an interview,

When I told you [about a revolution in Italy] six months ago you [journalists] got all scared. Then, after foreign journalists came and said the same, it became trendy [to talk about a revolution]. We, instead, have understood for years now that it would be like this, that a moment would arrive in which the idealistic philosophies would replace the materialistic philosophies and would give birth to a cultural and political revolution.⁶¹³

“In 1991, when many including in the League were convinced that the worst was behind us,” said Bossi, “I warned [our] officials: be ready, now [against us] the most insidious reaction of the regime will be unleashed... I was a good prophet.”⁶¹⁴

At the same time, Bossi highlights his resilience, his suffering, and his capacity to endure hardships in order to fulfill the mission. The image of sacrifice is dominant in Bossi’s discourse. As he wrote, “The League has cost me so much, in all kind of ways.”⁶¹⁵ He often tells the story of how one day his mother found him cooking for one of the political parties of the League: “[She said] ‘Look at you, from a doctor to a cook!’ This disturbed me,” Bossi said “but there was no other way if we wanted Lombardy and the north became free of roman tyranny one day.”⁶¹⁶ As he declared at a political rally: “I know how to distinguish creation from property. I know that the League is yours, even if it has cost innumerable sacrifices to some people, especially me. And, let it be known, that in so many years the League has not given me not even one lira.”⁶¹⁷ In the development of the narrative of himself as the savior, Bossi has played the character of the self-sacrificing son of Padania many times. “I think that the base of the League sees the right reference point only in me. They know I don’t betray” he said in an interview, “However the Romans are also aware of this and that is why they massacre my image and

⁶¹¹ “Umberto Bossi, Congresso Federale al Palavobis,” February 15, 1997, in *www.leganord.org*

⁶¹² Bossi, Umberto with Daniele Vimercati, *La Rivoluzione*, *op.cit.* p.15.

⁶¹³ “Bossi: che bella rivoluzione,” in *La Repubblica*, March 5, 1993.

⁶¹⁴ Bossi, Umberto, *Il Mio Progetto*, *op.cit.* p.154.

⁶¹⁵ Bossi, Umberto, *La Lega: 1979:1989*, *op.cit.* pp.38, 39

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.39.

⁶¹⁷ Bossi, Umberto *Il Mio Progetto*, *op.cit.* p.73.

hit me in all possible ways, because I represent the glue of the united North against *Roma ladrona* [Rome the thief] and its parties.”⁶¹⁸

The image of victimhood has always been present in the Bossi’s imagination. He has repeatedly stressed his persecution by Rome. “Personally, in my life I have had hundreds of judicial warnings, many unjust and pre-ordained sentences, daughters of Roman nationalism. We have to resist smiling.”⁶¹⁹ Furthermore, he claims that his unconditional defense of the group has put his own life in danger:” Yes, in order to stop Bossi there is a very quick way, but the ideal, *that* cannot be stopped by anyone.”⁶²⁰ “I could tell you about the threats, the so-called suggestions, the blackmails” he said at a press conference “I know very well that I’m surrounded, I know that they want me.”⁶²¹ In a meeting with his militants Bossi declared, “I can even become a persecuted, a prisoner for life, a Mandela of Padania, but the North wants federalism, the reforms and [that] cannot be stopped.”⁶²² Images of sacrifice and martyrdom in the narrative of Bossi are a dynamic part of the missionary dimension of his leadership. The savior goes through great hardships, and is ready to die, in order to redeem the entire community.

Bossi’s self-depiction, through his discourse, as a missionizing figure plays an important part in the development and consolidation of the Bossi industry. I will consider now how the hierarchical structure of the party reinforces and legitimates his primacy as the leader of the vanguard.

• The Personalized Party

The centralized structure of the Northern League plays a significant function in the identification of the party with its leader, Federal Secretary Umberto Bossi. There are five organizational sections: Federal, national, provincial, district and communal. At the top of the hierarchy is the Federal Secretary, who is elected by a federal congress, and the

⁶¹⁸ “Roma ci vuol depotenziare,” in *La Padania*, July 11, 1999.

⁶¹⁹ “Attenti alle due controleghhe,” in *La Padania*, August 1, 1999.

⁶²⁰ Vimercati, Daniele, *op.cit.*, p.117.

⁶²¹ “E il leader lumbard: al congresso chiederò carta bianca per il federalismo,” in *Il Corriere della Sera*, *op.cit.*

Federal Council, which is composed by the secretaries of the national sections and a dozen other members elected by the congress. The Federal Council has the right to dissolve the national sections of the party if they “act in clear contrast with the political, moral and administrative line established by the Federal Congress of the Northern League”⁶²³ The Federal Secretary has a say in all federal organs. He coordinates the directives of the Federal Congress and chairs the Federal Council. Furthermore, the statutes of the party establish that the Federal Secretary represents, at a political and legal level, the unity of the movement. At the same time the organizational structure encourages militancy. Membership is conditioned by the time (sometimes years) that a member has spent working for the party and proving his loyalty to the movement. The Northern League makes a strong distinction between old and new members. Only older members have rights and duties within the organization. There are no institutionalized criteria for promotion or career, which could have the risk of transferring the loyalty from the leadership to the organization. Only Bossi’s word leads to promotion.

Umberto Bossi has always justified the primacy of the leader within the Northern League as a necessity. Because enemies loom everywhere and try to infiltrate the group, the survival of the movement demanded a strong leadership. As Bossi has argued, “It is better to suffer accusations of hierarchization, or even worse of dictatorial management of the movement, then to allow the diffusion of immoral behavior.”⁶²⁴ “The Lombard League – and afterwards the Northern League – has been protected in many ways, “Bossi said, “in order to prevent disloyal officials from ruining the structure.”⁶²⁵ The primacy of the leader is accepted naturally by other officials, as the following words of Giancarlo Giorgetti reveal: “He is not just the current leader of the party: he is the party. He has an extremely charismatic influence over party members, and controls the party entirely by himself. Anyone seen to challenge his authority is expelled.”⁶²⁶

Bossi sees the Northern League as a true example of direct democracy. So far, he has always been reelected by acclamation, without a formal ballot. With a strong public

⁶²² “Bossi: tempo scaduto per il governo,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, August 21, 1995.

⁶²³ Roberto Biorcio, *La Padania Promessa*, *op.cit.*, p.219.

⁶²⁴ Bossi, Umberto, *La Rivoluzione*, *op.cit.*, p.170.

⁶²⁵ Bossi, Umberto, *Tutta La Verità*, *op.cit.*, p.115.

mandate from the party congress, Bossi always sets the agenda of the organization. As he once said:

The delegates have become conscious of the need to put on the road a car with one driver at the wheel. When the car drives at 150 miles an hour, the driver must be left alone ... I am at the top of the League with a precise mandate: to prevent the horses from stopping at the manger of the regime, so that they become fat and let themselves be ridden by our enemies. I cannot admit that the strategy of the movement is put under discussion at every curve. I am the guarantor of this strategy. I intend to respect the mandate of congress.⁶²⁷

The Federal Council is, in essence, an instrument of Bossi's power. A former member of the Federal Council, Senator Tabladini, describes the absolute dominance of Bossi in these meetings in the following way:

The term "Council" might give the wrong impression. Everyone went there to listen to the Secretary [Bossi] who was always mildly angry, who didn't care about any agenda, who would distribute epithets to anyone. [The other members] do not even contradict him because that would be the guillotine, but would nod [like robots] ... It was in practice a long monologue only interrupted by the ring of his cell phone.⁶²⁸

The creation in 1998 of a new section in the party – the *Segretaria Politica* (Political Committee) – testifies to the complete sway that Bossi holds over the structure of the party. Bossi appointed its members, and its goal was to provide "support and consultancy for Bossi."⁶²⁹ The party paper explained the rationale for this new organ by saying that "the fight of the League relates to many sectors of society and, therefore, it must be conducted, within the intents of Bossi, in an effective way."⁶³⁰ This section is typical of the hierarchical and personalized structure of the Northern League. All components of the party ultimately relate to Bossi and follow his personal guidelines. The uniting force is absolute loyalty to the leader.

In an organization that gives complete primacy to the leader and where personal allegiance to the leader and his mission play a crucial role, dissent is invariably perceived as an act of personal betrayal and lack of commitment to the cause. Therefore in the

⁶²⁶ Giancarlo Giorgetti, Segretario Nazionale Lega Lombarda, Interview with the author, May 19, 2004.

⁶²⁷ Bossi, Umberto with Daniele Vimercati, *op.cit.*, p.90.

⁶²⁸ Tabladini, Francesco, *op.cit.*, p.69.

⁶²⁹ "Pronti alla battaglia," in *La Padania*, December 23, 1998.

vocabulary of the Northern League, dissension is synonymous with treason. According to Bossi,

I have had no regrets when I had to get rid of the men who had not respected their commitment. The consensus of the base is the measure of all of my choices... They left no trace, neither among the people nor inside the party. They sold a great idea in the pursuit of their personal ambitions. Without them the League is richer... It is not a coincidence that those gentlemen end up nowhere or survive in a pathetic way, like the former president of the Chamber of Deputies [Irene Pivetti]. The one who betrays the people is condemned by the people to the most terrible punishment for ambition: oblivion.⁶³¹

Time and again, Bossi warns against the enemy within. Those who leave the League are invariably characterized as agents infiltrated by the League's enemies whose purpose was to divide and ultimately destroy the group. The need to expunge internal spies is a recurring theme for Bossi:

There is always someone who, every four years, ends up involved with Rome and clinging to the enemies of the North and of the "Northern Question." It's like the Olympics of those who side with the Romans: In 1991 it was Castellazzi, in 1994-5 those who followed Berlusconi; Now [1999] we have the same types, climbers that always side with the wealthy.⁶³²

Bossi has repeatedly referred to the expelling of dissidents as a necessary "cleansing"⁶³³ of the group. Dissension is described as if it were a disease that weakens and corrupts the body of the party. During one of these periods of "purification," Bossi said that "it is necessary that the 'fifth columns' internal to our movement crumble; it is necessary to squeeze the pus out of the League."⁶³⁴ In the discourse of the Northern League, betrayal is always possible, and this perception maintains the tension and mobilization within the group at high levels. Personal doubt could be the beginning of betrayal. Therefore, any member's qualms regarding the ultimate cause of the group and the abilities of the leader must be put aside. As Bossi stated: "We have to be aware of the resistance that we will find in the decisive battle. To combat until the end we need to

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶³¹ Bossi, Umberto, *Processo alla Lega*, *op.cit.*, p.107.

⁶³² "Il Congresso a Bossi: hai carta bianca," in *La Padania*, July 26, 1999.

⁶³³ "Lega, iniziate le 'grandi pulizie'," in *La Padania*, July 6 1999.

⁶³⁴ "Il Congresso a Bossi: hai carta bianca," in *La Padania*, July 26, 1999.

know that the greatest enemy is inside us, between ourselves: it is division, doubt regarding the final goal.”⁶³⁵

So far, I have endeavored to demonstrate that both the personalized nature of the party and the promotion of a cohesive and compact organization are important ingredients in the consolidation of the leader’s missionary leadership. I’ve shown how these attributes coincide with a polarized view of reality, a sense of imminent catastrophe, and a near deification of the leader, who is regarded and who presents himself as a man of superhuman prescience and political ability. Furthermore I’ve shown how internal betrayal and purging of the disloyal is a constant theme in Bossi’s discourse. Now, I will look at the role of symbolism and ritual in binding of the close knit-community of the League. I will end with a discussion of Bossi’s missionary charisma.

⁶³⁵ Bossi, Umberto, with Daniele Vimercati, *Processo alla Lega*, *op.cit.*, p.180.

3.2 Religious Symbolism

• Rhetoric

Umberto Bossi has always defended the lay nature of his movement. To him, “the League is secular, it is perhaps the first Italian political force authentically secular.”⁶³⁶ As noted by Bossi in an interview, “The Church has always taken a position against us. I don’t know why. I’m a layperson, I don’t follow these things very closely, but I know that there are priests close to us, to our people who have understood that the process [freedom for Padania] is unstoppable.”⁶³⁷ Although his party is not indeed a confessional party Bossi has used repeatedly Christian images to describe the threats to his community and has adopted a good-versus evil imagery in his denunciation, for example, of globalization. The final goal of his vanguard should be to vanquish evil.

In Bossi’s eschatology a gigantic final battle is going on in the world. Either a new era of freedom and prosperity will arise from this battle, or else it will spell the end of democracy and the end of cultural and ethnic diversity. As noted, for Bossi, we are living through an epochal confrontation between two different visions of the world that corresponds to a battle between good and evil: “The vision of ‘Lucifer,’ of the Jacobins and Masons that have worked on finance in order to impose their ‘business community,’ the power of elites over the citizens, and [the vision] of the League, according to which the economy, like power, must come from [the people] below.”⁶³⁸ At another occasion Bossi referred to the increasing danger that “materialism, that is, the evil, erases the spiritual dimension of Man. The confrontation that is taken place today concerns, closely, Christianity.”⁶³⁹ “The struggle pits local Identity against the evil empire that is

⁶³⁶ Bossi, Umberto, *Il Mio Progetto*, op.cit, p.196.

⁶³⁷ “Tra La Chiesa e il Dio Po,” in *Famiglia Cristiana*, n.24, June 11 1997.

⁶³⁸ “Bossi: la legge va rispettata, tutti se ne devono ricordare,” in *La Padania*, September 19, 2002.

⁶³⁹ “Bossi Vicenza, incontro con Haider,” in *La Stampa*, October 19, 1999.

globalization. If we take action soon evil can be stopped immediately,” Bossi said in an interview.⁶⁴⁰

• Ritual

In order to legitimate the strategy of renunciation and redemption of the world that is the basis of the movement, the Northern League has provided its supporters with a vision of an alternative world. Specifically, it has provided them with a new collective identity that defines the peoples of the north of Italy as a specific historical group united by shared traditions and values. Ritual has at all times been an essential facet of the symbolic construction of this alternative world by the Northern League. These repetitive and standardized actions have had the purpose of reinforcing the solidarity within the group while at the same time augmenting the emotional investment in Umberto Bossi as the standard-bearer of the mission. Among the organized mass-events by the Northern League two of them occupy a central place in this process: the annual rally, inaugurated in 1990 at Pontida, where in April, 1167, the communes of the north vowed to resist the emperor Barbarossa; and the annual rally in Venice, where the Padani celebrate the independence of Padania, announced by Bossi in 1996.

These annual rallies invest the ultimate goal of the Northern League – the freedom for Padania – and the members’ allegiance and commitment to the mission with a sacred nature. The first great manifestation in Pontida was convened in 1990, where newly elected members of the party swore loyalty to the movement. From that moment on, as is written in one of the party biographies, “nothing must distract them from the task that it has been given to them: that is, to be the loyal tools of the Lombard League in the fight for Lombardy.”⁶⁴¹ The text of the oath, which was aimed at establishing a parallel between the oath taken by the defenders of the region in the twelfth century and its contemporary defenders declared that:

⁶⁴⁰ “Bossi: made in Padania o muore la nostra storia,” in *La Padania*, November 14, 1999.

⁶⁴¹ “La Vera Storia Della Lega Nord,” *op.cit.*, p.48.

Today in Pontida our commitment is bound to the sacrifices of our ancestors who chose this place to swear their commitment to the defense of freedom. I, who have decided to join in the lists of *Lega Lombarda-Lega Nord* to become an active standard-bearer in the fight for the autonomy of the people from Lombardy, Veneto, Piemontese, Ligure, Emiliano, Romagnolo and Toscano, unite my oath with those of our ancestors. I swear loyalty to the cause of the autonomy and freedom of our peoples, which today, as it was a thousand years ago, is incarnated in the *Lega Lombarda* and its democratically elected officials.”⁶⁴²

The then party paper, *Lombardia Autonomista*, announced that “an oath, a big Lombard party, 8,000 militants of the Lombard League celebrating in Pontida. Sunday, May 20, 1990, will remain a historical day for our movement and for Lombardy.” It added, “After 800 years, History with a capital ‘H’ repeats itself, notwithstanding those who say that history has ended.”⁶⁴³ This claim for the sacred aura of Pontida has continued in the imagination of the Northern League. Within this narrative, Pontida stands for uncompromising loyalty and devotion to the all-consuming sacred mission of liberating Padania from oppressive forces. Referring to the 1990 oath, the party daily *La Padania* observed that “In this way was a long story of loyalty was initiated, that repeats itself for thirteen years ... the moving history of a movement that has unhinged the apparent immutable rules of old politics.”⁶⁴⁴

The high point of the annual rallies to Pontida is a solemn speech by Umberto Bossi. In these speeches, Bossi announces the steps that the movement must take in order to fulfill its mission. As ritual events, these speeches have a standard form. Bossi explains, in a pedagogic manner, the realities of Italy and the world and then unveils the path forward for the movement. He announces new decisions and asks for the approval of the people, which is invariably given. This rite of the legitimation of Bossi as the guide for the group happens every year in what *La Padania* calls the “Sacred Ground of Pontida,”⁶⁴⁵ where Bossi plays the role of the prophet who interprets the present and points the way toward the future. The group expects the leader to play this role. As written in *La Padania*,

⁶⁴² “Giuramento di Fedeltà”, Pontida, 20 Maggio 1990, *ibid*, p.48.

⁶⁴³ *Lombardia Autonomista*, May 1990.

⁶⁴⁴ “Ottomila Guerrieri di Liberta’ in Nome del Popolo,” in *La Padania*, April 30, 2003.

⁶⁴⁵ “Tutti a Pontida il 6 Giugno,” in *La Padania*, May 15, 2004.

Every time that Bossi calls for the gathering of the men and women of the North in Pontida, a new page of political history is opened. We go to Pontida to understand what will happen in Rome, to reason about politics, because change comes from the North. It was like that also in April 7, 1167 when men who wanted to be the masters of their houses again subscribed to a pact of loyalty against Barbarossa, in the same Pontida of the historical abbey ... The present and the future of this redemption from centralism continues to come from the meadow of Pontida with the words of Bossi to accelerate the reforms.⁶⁴⁶

The following piece of Gigi Moncalvo, director of *La Padania*, epitomizes the trust in Bossi as the guide who, in Pontida, sheds light on the path to the future. According to Moncalvo,

We are ready one more time to follow the battles, the indications, the political line outlined by Bossi. And today in Pontida the people of the League will show [that] to everyone, one more time ... We believe, [we] think, and know that Bossi has all the elements to know what to do and how to do it. And today, [Bossi] first on the stage and then in the middle of the crowd, looking in the eyes the People [sic] of Pontida, the flags, the faces, the smiles of our militants, seeing that unique spectacle in the world and listening to the cry that comes from Pontida – the ‘Freedom for Padania’ from thousands of people – our secretary will have one more element, important and emotional, democratic and binding, to establish what are the most just decisions, the path in which we’ll walk, the ways to get closer to the final goal. The road is still long, it’s not easy ... Bossi knows all of this very well.⁶⁴⁷

Pontida symbolizes the periodic renewal of trust between the leader and his followers. It is also the place where the leader goes every time he wants to test the loyalty of the group towards him. After the disappointing results in the European election of 1999 that risked undermining Bossi’s leadership, he announced that he would submit his resignation as Federal Secretary at a rally in Pontida. In Pontida the followers of the Northern League would have to vote for or against Bossi’s continuation as head of the movement. “I put myself at stake,” declared Bossi, “for a cultural revolution, to wake up the conscience of the people of the North from its sleepless state.”⁶⁴⁸ Bossi wanted to make sure that the militant followers were firmly behind him. What followed was a collective and public testament of loyalty from all sectors of the party from long time officials to simple militants. The President of the Northern League Stefano Stefani made it clear that “although we can discuss many things, only one thing is not in discussion: the

⁶⁴⁶ “Il cammino verso la devolution,” in *La Padania*, April 29, 2003.

⁶⁴⁷ “Contro I nemici del cambiamento,” in *La Padania*, May 4, 2003.

⁶⁴⁸ “Mi metto in gioco in cambio di una rivoluzione culturale,” in *La Padania*, June 17, 1999.

irreplaceable nature of Umberto Bossi as the guide of the Northern League.”⁶⁴⁹ The “letters to the editor” section of *La Padania* was swamped with emotional comments of its readers about Bossi’s intention to resign. These letters, in which the leader was overwhelmingly referred to by first name, show personal devotion and a sense of intimate connection to the leader. Here are a few examples:

Dear Umberto... *Non si Lasciare!* [Do not leave us!]; Umberto, you have made us dream. You are always in our hearts as our unique guide, polar star of the north!; Umberto, wake up from the nightmare ... if you resign, ‘they’ have won.; Umberto, without you there is neither Padania, nor future ... Do not abandon us, otherwise we will all leave.; Umberto, please, don’t give in; Dear Umberto, we are disturbed by your declaration. You cannot abandon your people! Without you there is no future for us; Dear Umberto, you cannot leave us now, you cannot abandon your children ... I’ll be in Pontida ... to yell out loud how much all of us love you; I’m telling you: without you never, *you are* the League and we are your extension.”⁶⁵⁰

In Pontida, the commitment of the followers to their leader was reinforced and the militants voted overwhelmingly for Bossi to stay on. Under the suggestive headline *Il nostro Condottiero non si tocca* (No one touches our Leader), *La Padania* asserted that “The battle of the League restarts. It will be one more time guided by Bossi.”⁶⁵¹ The loyalty of the followers to Bossi had been tested in the sacred place of Pontida, and they had passed the exam. The leader remained, with increased legitimacy, as the guide of the vanguard.

Another major symbolic event for the Northern League is the annual rally in Venice. In September 1996, in solemn ceremony, Bossi took water from the source of the Po River and initiated a pilgrimage that took him and his entourage to Venice, where the water from the Po River was poured by a nine-year old girl, dressed in pink and symbolizing the new republic, into the lagoon of the city. The pouring of water was described by the party organ as “an act of purification” indicating the “refusal of subordination to Rome” of the peoples of Padania.⁶⁵² This ceremony was intended to symbolize the birth of Padania and constituted a crucial moment of three days of rallies of the militants and sympathizers of the Northern League, from the source of the river in

⁶⁴⁹ “Il presidente federale: propongo di convocare l’assemblea del Carroccio,” in *La Padania*, June 19, 1999.

⁶⁵⁰ “La Parola ai Lettori,” in *La Padania*, Issues of June 16-22, 1999.

⁶⁵¹ “Il nostro Condottiero non si tocca,” in *La Padania*, June 22, 1999.

Monviso to Venice. In this period an oath was taken for the “Declaration of Independence and Sovereignty of Padania.” It read,

We, the people of Padania, assembled in the great Po River.... From immemorial times we have lived, worked, protected and loved these lands, passed on to us by our ancestors.... Here we have developed an original way of life, of developing the arts and work. We belong to a historical area, the Padania, that under a socio-economic profile is strongly integrated internally... We constitute a national, cultural, and socio-economic community founded on a shared patrimony of values, culture and history and on homogeneous social, moral, and economic conditions... The History of the Italian State, instead, is a history of colonial oppression, of economic exploitation and moral violence. Over time, through its bureaucracy the Italian State has systematically occupied the social and economic system of Padania... These are the reasons why: We firmly believe that the continuation of Padania under the Italian State would mean any hope of rebirth would die out... we firmly believe that a free and independent Padania will become a political and institutional reference for the construction of the Europe of regions and Europe of peoples.... We, people of Padania; because the courage and the faith of those who fought for the freedom of peoples are our inspiration and must lead us to take our own destiny... In the name and with the authority that comes from the Natural Right for self-determination into our hands... We, peoples of Padania solemnly proclaim: The Padania is a federal republic, independent and sovereign.⁶⁵³

During this historical episode, described as a “sacred moment,”⁶⁵⁴ the Northern League publicly proclaimed a provisional constitution and a “Bill of Rights of the Citizens of Padania.”⁶⁵⁵ Every year this rite that is commonly known as the “Ceremony of the Water” is repeated; the mass-rally culminates, as in Pontida, with a solemn speech by Umberto Bossi. Like Pontida, this ritual serves as a symbolic representation of the sacred mission of the group; a representation of the freedom for Padania. The position of the League in the Italian political landscape has not affected the celebration of the ritual. “Yesterday a journalist asked me why is the League still pouring water of the Po River in the lagoon of Venice now that we are heading towards governing,” Bossi said at one of the rallies in Venice “‘isn’t that a symbol of secession?’ [She asked] I told her that it is much bigger than that, it is the symbol of our identity.”⁶⁵⁶ In the party literature this event is characterized as “the birth of Padania.”⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵² *Lega Nord-Padania Indipendente*, “Padania, Padania,” September 16, 1996.

⁶⁵³ “Dichiarazione di Indipendenza e Sovranità della Padania”, 15 Settembre 1996, in *La Vera Storia Della Lega Nord*, *op.cit.*, p.140.142

⁶⁵⁴ “Padania Libera,” *Lega Nord-Padania Indipendente*, July 29, 1996.

⁶⁵⁵ “La vera storia della Lega Nord,” *op.cit.* pp.142-145

⁶⁵⁶ “Bossi: Il potere deve nascere dal basso,” in *La Padania*, September 20, 2001.

⁶⁵⁷ “Preparatevi, Arriva Venezia,” in *La Padania*, April 29, 2003.

The rituals of Pontida and Venice both serve to consolidate the alternative world promoted by the Northern League. Alongside these two major mass-rallies, the party regularly organizes rallies, conventions, conferences, and “Padania Days” in different parts of the north.⁶⁵⁸ The creation of specifically Padania groups and associations are part of this strategy of cementing the image of Padania in the rank-and-file’s collective imagination. It has created such organizations as a special security guard called *Guardia Nazionale Padana* (Padania National Guard), *Sport Padano* (Sport from Padania), *Movimento Giovani Padani* (Youth from Padania), *Donne Padane* (Women from Padania), *Cattolici Padani* (Catholics from Padania) and *Scuola Padana* (Padania School). Each gathering of the “people of Padania” either in Pontida or Venice spawns an atmosphere that resembles a festival with a playful dimension constituted by organized games and musical events. At the same time all the associations close to the movement make themselves visible at their own stands. In the words of one of the organizers:

Everything in Pontida emanates history and myth. Emanates autonomy from central powers, in the past from Germany, in the present from Rome. The meeting in Pontida is also a true festival, like the one in Lorien. There are 300/400 hundred stands of associations, movements, groups. They sell everything: stamps, bumper stickers, craftsmanship. There are the motorcyclists, truck drivers, fishermen, linguistic and cultural associations, [people] play the *baghet* (Lombard bagpipe). Every nation of Padania has its stand, with their own typical products to drink and eat ... the night before [the end of the rally], we, the youth of Padania, have our own meeting, we play Celtic or Irish music, and [we] have our own groups who speak in our local languages.⁶⁵⁹

At the same time the party has launched beauty contests such as “Miss Padania,” “Miss ‘Green Shirt’” and “Miss Sun of the Alps,” held every year. Bossi always attends these contests.⁶⁶⁰ The intense symbolic production of the Northern League can also be seen in the adoption of the *Sole delle Alpi* (Sun of the Alps), a green, six-rayed Celtic symbol, as the logo of the party, and in the chromatic adoption of green as the color of the movement. These are all part of the attempt to reinforce the alternative history of the Padani. In the choreography of the party’s congresses and rallies, the color green is dominant. An article in *La Padania* refers to the color green as “our totemic color,” adding that because of the Northern League “the Green Sun of recovery and awakening

⁶⁵⁸ See, for example, “Padania day, la forza viene dal basso,” in *La Padania*, January 16, 2000.

⁶⁵⁹ Paolo Grimoldi, President of Padania Youth, Interview with the author, May 24, 2004.

⁶⁶⁰ See, “La Lega elegge Miss Padania ma gli applausi sono per Bossi,” in *La Repubblica*, April 2, 2004.

shines in the North.”⁶⁶¹ Bossi often dresses in green because “in order to succeed in persuading the others we have to give visible examples. We have, and I’ve already decided personally, to wear green shirts more often.”⁶⁶²

The development of its own media network, including *Telepadania* (Padania Television), *Radio Padania Libera* (Radio Padania Free) and *La Padania* (The Padania - daily newspaper) and a Website serve as a way of strengthening the identity of the group by releasing information and programs free from the perceived bias of the regime.⁶⁶³ The following description by Stefania Piazzo of the role played by the party periodical testify of the importance that the party gives to their media: “*Lega Nord* [party weekly] is and remains our pride ... because it has carried the ideas that have raise from the earth a people who was dozed, almost resigned; it has sowed the conscience of an identity.”⁶⁶⁴ Every rally of the Northern League culminates with the playing of the piece *Va Pensiero*, from the Giuseppe Verdi’s opera *Nabucco*, which was adopted as the “national anthem” of the Northern League.⁶⁶⁵

• A Moral Community

This on-going construction of a symbolic reality increases the perception of the Northern League’s exceptional nature in the minds of its followers, expanding their own self-perception as a unique community integrated by an alternative set of historical roots and values. An official of the Northern League observed that “some commentators, showing all their ignorance and materialism, speak in a superficial way or ridicule our celebration, they despise what they don’t know, what they don’t feel to be as ‘their thing,’ because they are strangers to popular culture.” He added, “we instead are proud of this day in Monviso [the ceremony of the water], because behind those peaks we celebrate an

⁶⁶¹ “Verde: il nostro colore totemico,” in *La Padania*, February 13, 2000.

⁶⁶² “Umberto Bossi, intervento al 3 Congresso Federale 1997,” *op.cit.*

⁶⁶³ “Comunicazione,” in www.leganord.org

⁶⁶⁴ “Lega Nord è diventata grande,” *Lega Nord-Padania Indipendente*, December 9, 1996.

⁶⁶⁵ “Costituzione Transitoria,” in *La Vera Storia della Lega Nord*, *op.cit.*, p.143.

important appointment to recover the identity of the north.”⁶⁶⁶ “One who has never been in this meeting of the people [Pontida],” emphasized *La Padania*, “does not know what its meaning is.”⁶⁶⁷

In the alternative world created by the Northern League, gatherings of the party are interpreted not as mere political meetings but as a testimony of faith in the members’ collective mission. In the words of a movement official, “Pontida remains the party [as in festival] of the League, which a militant, a Padani, a supporter cannot in any way miss. Beyond anything else Pontida is a pilgrimage that must be accomplished at least once a year.”⁶⁶⁸ The Federal Coordinator of the Padania Youth expresses a similar sense of destiny about the community assembled in Pontida as follows:

It is amazing how a political movement manages to bring together thousands of people in the name of our identity, and to take an oath about the freedom of our peoples. Sometimes we don’t think about it, we are used to it; but if we reflect we become aware of the importance of the event. This is the sign that our movement is a movement destined to change the history of the country.⁶⁶⁹

The militants, those who have undergone the path of integration into the alternative world of the party, are a community of true believers united in their sense of collective mission and profoundly devoted to the leader. A former official of the Northern League, Francesco Tabladini, sees in the pool of voters for the Northern League two kinds of people. In his words,

In practice, the crowd that flocks to our meetings is always the same: it grows or diminishes according to the appeal of the demonstration, but we are always talking about tens of thousands. To make a practical example of the voters of the League it is necessary to imagine two containers of different proportions that have scarce connections between them, if any. In the smaller one are the “*movimentisti*” [activists]; they are those who go to Pontida, to Venice, to [the river] Po and wherever Bossi calls them. This container augments and diminishes in negligible ways ... they seem many and in reality they are many, but they are always the same ones. Then there is the other container, with bigger capacity, that determines the electoral results without making noise. They don’t go to Pontida or Venice ... this is the container that it was filled in April 1996 and that now is emptying inexorably.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁶ “Bossi domain a Pian del Re preleverà l’acqua del grande Po,” in *La Padania*, September 11, 1998.

⁶⁶⁷ “Il ‘pratone’ della verità,” in *La Padania*, June 15, 1999.

⁶⁶⁸ “In ‘pellegrinaggio’ a Pontida culla del popolo Padano,” in *La Padania*, June 20, 2002.

⁶⁶⁹ “La storia di Pontida lancia nel futuro I giovani Padani,” in *La Padania*, June 19, 2002.

⁶⁷⁰ Tabladini, Francesco, *op.cit.*, p.121.

The attachment of the militants towards the leader is of a different nature than the attachment of the general voter. The leader puts forward an account that encourages the inner core to see itself as a community of belief. Bossi repeatedly stresses the emotional values that unite those who belong to this community. In the discourse of Bossi the Northern League is a community bonded by *love*. In his own words,

I say often that the League is like a baby; it is the result of love. I am convinced that this movement is the result of the generous work of thousands of men and women who feel strongly toward each other, who feel strong about the city they live in, about the nation that they belong to. The baby has grown, has started to walk with its legs. But there's still work to do so that it becomes an adult and fulfils its ambitions.⁶⁷¹

"Our patriotism is the love for our Padania," declared Bossi in one of the League's congresses, "the love for our peoples, who have united their forces to fight the beautiful battle of Freedom."⁶⁷² "To love something means to hug it, not to repel it," said Bossi regarding those who "sold" the ideals of the League for their own self-interest, "Padania is really the only thing that we have."⁶⁷³ According to Bossi, "our love, dear Padania, brought you back to life. Not as an ordinary country but as our Fatherland."⁶⁷⁴

In the narrative of the leader of the Northern League, there is a leap of *faith* at the very basis of the movement. This faith-based nature of the League's politics is a recurrent theme. A messianic certitude about the success of the movement can be seen in the following words of Bossi,

Without faith it is not possible to make politics, and my faith is the certainty that the good right of the North to be free sooner or later will prevail over Roman colonialism. I have never doubted, since the League was formed by just a few militants, that in the end we will be free of Rome. I have always thought that if [the goal] wasn't reached by my generation and me it would be reached by my children and, after them, the children of my children.⁶⁷⁵

Addressing the League's parliamentarians, Bossi stated that "any one of you, perhaps without a total understanding but with the strength of faith, of that faith that moves

⁶⁷¹ Bossi, Umberto with Daniele Vimercati, *Vento dal Nord*, op.cit, p.92.

⁶⁷² "L'Intervento integrale del Segretario Federale, riconfermato ieri," in *La Padania*, March 29, 1998.

⁶⁷³ "Congresso Federale Straordinario della Lega Nord," October 24, 25 1998 in www.leganord.org

⁶⁷⁴ "Dio assista la Padania," January 27, 2004.

⁶⁷⁵ Bossi, Umberto, *La Lega: 1979-1989*, op.cit, p.95.

mountains, has done your part in this grand design.⁶⁷⁶ “The master of the League is the people,” declared Bossi at a rally in Pontida, “the people who are looked after by the faith of Pontida: a civil and lay faith in the common good of freedom.”⁶⁷⁷ Time and again, in order to keep the levels of mobilization of the militancy high, Bossi warns against the dangers of the weakening of faith. At one of these moments he said,

We can say that it is a problem of conscience that sometimes can weaken, [a problem of] weak faith, we can say. And weak faith leads to a reduced willingness for sacrifice. And without faith, as we know it, the faith that moves mountains, without [faith] Padania cannot appear. This you all know, I’m certain; [without faith] we cannot do anything other than settle and go for careers, [materialistic] things, etc ... and God forbid that this kind of people would [belong to our movement].⁶⁷⁸

Faith sets the militants apart from ordinary people and gives them strength in moments of doubt regarding the project. “The lack of faith is unbearable,” declared Bossi at a congress, “Do not despair, because it is despair that destroys the world, because it is easier to dominate those who do not believe in anything.”⁶⁷⁹

In Bossi’s discourse the political action of the Northern League is always framed in terms of *ideal*. For him, the rise of the League brought with it the return of the ideals to the political life.

[The other parties] didn’t understand that the League was winning because the materialistic philosophy that had won in the post-war was in crisis and that new idealist horizons were being opened ... they didn’t understand that the League was somewhere else. It was impossible to damage it because it belonged to another world, [the world] of the great ideals.⁶⁸⁰

“Federalism, [and] freedom,” declared Bossi at a Pontida rally, “are like oxygen for us. They are a dream: either we’ll achieve it or we’ll die because of it. They are great ideals, great love.”⁶⁸¹ As Bossi warned at a rally in Venice, the battle for federalism will be a “very tough battle. But we from the League are not soldiers of fortune. We are not

⁶⁷⁶ “Ora la Padania ha un cuore,” in *La Padania*, July 14, 1998.

⁶⁷⁷ “1994 Lega di Lotta e di Governo,” in *La Padania*, May 1, 2003.

⁶⁷⁸ “Intervento del Segretario Federale Umberto Bossi,” September 7, 1998, *op.cit.*

⁶⁷⁹ “Congresso Federale Straordinario della Lega Nord,” October 24,25, 1998.

⁶⁸⁰ Bossi, Umberto, *Il Mio Progetto*, *op.cit.*, p.56.

⁶⁸¹ “L’intervento del segretario federale della Lega Nord Umberto Bossi pronunciato a Pontida,” *op.cit.*

mercenaries. We are idealists ready for any clash.”⁶⁸² In the narrative of Bossi the word dream is interchangeable with the ultimate ideal goal of the group. In his words:

The base [militants] is strongly characterized by the [power of] dream, and by dream we mean the tension towards the transformation of society, a dream that is worthwhile to fight for, which in our case is the freedom of the Padani peoples. There cannot be a lack of dream otherwise we would lose the base of the party, and a party without a base cannot achieve any change.⁶⁸³

Bossi’s language is purposefully belligerent, and in the ongoing battle for the concretization of the project Bossi puts a high premium on *courage*. “The League is a force of courage,” he said to his militants “We can confront any adversity.”⁶⁸⁴ As he stated in a speech: “Courage is the first great gift that the League has brought to the Italians. The courage to confront the corrupt and to remember the roots of our own history.”⁶⁸⁵ The *sacrifice* of the militancy is an imperative in order to fulfill the collective mission of the group. “The hope of the peoples is a shining aurora but the dawn is still faraway,” said Bossi “The battle will be long and difficult.”⁶⁸⁶

In the narrative of the leader there is an all-consuming sense of mission that binds the group together and transforms it into a pious community. “Until we reach our goal,” declared Bossi, “any man of the League must have only one concern: to work towards a politics aimed at the transformation of Italy in a federal State. One goal to be achieved no matter what the cost.”⁶⁸⁷ All suffering and sacrifices can be endured by the community because they are part of a wider story, a wider order that offers an ultimate goal that lies in the future. As long as there a final goal that offers salvation, suffering can and should be endured by hardcore believers in the Northern League. The militants see themselves as a righteous community of people bound by the same idealist fervor for, commitment to and belief in the justice and goodness of the mission. “The militant [from the Northern League] does not have only a political idea, but almost a faith,” notes Matteo Salvini, official of the Northern League and director of Radio Padania, “[the militant] does not

⁶⁸² “Intervento del Segretario Federale,” Venice, September 15, 2002.

⁶⁸³ “Padania, sogno che diventa realtà,” in *La Padania*, August 5, 1998.

⁶⁸⁴ “Intervento del Segretario Federale Umberto Bossi,” September 7, 1998, *op.cit.*

⁶⁸⁵ Bossi, Umberto, *IL Mio Progetto*, pp.202, 203.

⁶⁸⁶ Bossi, Umberto, *Vento dal Nord*, *op.cit.*, p.85.

⁶⁸⁷ Bossi, Umberto, *Tutta la Verità*, *op.cit.*, p.176.

have an ideology but has absolute confidence in Bossi and in the idea of federalism and freedom of the north which makes him dedicate hours and days, voluntarily, to political activities and more.”⁶⁸⁸ Viviana, member of the Padania Youth, sees in the “belief in an ideal, the Padania” the reason why the militants of the Northern League are fundamentally diverse from all other militants. “The initiatives of the Northern League are carried out by the militants because they believe in them and not because they are being paid as happens in other political parties,”⁶⁸⁹ she added.

The following words of the provincial secretary of Como testify to this deep-rooted self-perception of the uniqueness of the members of the community:

The first requisite of a militant is the faith in the ideal that, supported by enthusiasm and courage, can surmount and overwhelm any obstacle and fear... From the iron discipline of courage arises the free civic consciousness and the moral sense from which originate the balance, coherence and finally the strength to carry out a great mission ... *like the soldier who faces the extreme sacrifice - and wins the 'saintly battle' – after the captain reminds him of the suffering endured, the courage showed and the recompense of the supreme redemption: it is like that for the true militant who gives everything and does not asks for anything else than to serve the just cause* [Italics mine] ... The League has always known how awaken the courage, the enthusiasm, the brotherly union, and the faith in the ideal that have shaped the only real Militant: our Militant.⁶⁹⁰

The messianic character of the vanguard is visible in the way a parliamentarian, Simonetta Faverio, described the ultimate goodness of the Northern League. According to her,

We have believed and still believe that the citizens have the right and the duty of making history by writing a new pact between themselves. *We are those who think we have ideas to offer not only to Italy but also to all men.* [italics mine] We are those who have renounced the small tricks and conveniences of the usual habit of compromise, [in order to] to think big and, like poets, we have constructed our model of the world, our model of social cohabitation. We try to impose the idea that we love, as do honest and defenseless people: working hard to persuade others of the goodness of our project. We know that the one who claims its dignity and wants to change things will have a difficult life and many cruel enemies.⁶⁹¹

Given this redemptionist message, it is not surprising that the community interprets dissension as a moral failure. The dissenter did not live up to the high standard

⁶⁸⁸ Matteo Salvini, Direttore Radio Padania Libera, Interview with the author, July 6, 2004.

⁶⁸⁹ Viviana, Member of Padania Youth, Interview with the author, June 15, 2004.

⁶⁹⁰ “I Leghisti: militanti, non mercenary,” in *La Padania*, January 10, 2001.

of the group. "The men of the League," noted Bossi at a rally in Pontida, "have the moral, rather than political, duty to remain compact and deaf to the sirens of the regime."⁶⁹² As declared by Bossi, "Betrayals - because *they are* betrayals – sadden me, but they don't surprise me. I know very well that men easily give up to temptation."⁶⁹³ Periods of difficulty are seen as tests of the loyalty of the individual to the community. The following words of one of the provincial secretaries of the Northern League reveal the elitist high-mindedness of the group. In his view,

The moment of crisis such in profoundly idealistic movements as the Northern League for the independence of Padania, also have positive aspects; in fact they test the loyalty and the ideal [sic] of the men, causing a beneficial 'natural selection' that keeps away the rotten apples, the opportunists."⁶⁹⁴

Evidently, recruitment into the community is not an ordinary process based on simple persuasion. It is a process based on the conversion of others to an all-consuming project. Ordinary political parties demand a minimum participation from their supporters; at best theirs is a partial involvement. The Northern League, however, demands maximum participation and the involvement required is total. A writer close to the party complained about the fact that "its activists are subject to an excess of activism: A day does not go by without being called to a manifestation, [whether] collecting signatures, joining an association, attending a course, show or conference."⁶⁹⁵ The demanding nature of Northern League militancy can be seen in the following words of long time official, Gilberto Oneto:

In order to strengthen its tactical maneuvers (whatever they might be) the Federal Secretary needs to have obedient people, [needs] a disciplined troop, of militants of a movement, not of a party... our militants must not distract themselves with sordid games of power but [they] must convince, convert, and create consensus. Every militant must be a propagandist, a preacher, an enlister: Like a small seed [the militant] must concentrate in itself all the genes of the big tree of freedom ...

⁶⁹¹ "Sarà la storia a fare giustizia," in *La Padania*, September 23, 1998.

⁶⁹² "Discorso di Bossi, Pontida, 1991," *op.cit.*

⁶⁹³ Bossi, Umberto and Daniele Vimercati, *Vento dal Nord*, *op.cit.*, p.85.

⁶⁹⁴ "Bergamo, per Forza Italia la politica è un supermercato – di Daniele Belotti," in *La Padania*, July 9, 1999.

⁶⁹⁵ "Padani: è solo l'inizio: Riflessioni sul momento politico della Lega e del Movimento indipendentista" in *Quaderni Padani*, Anno IV, N.17, May-June 1998.

when a commander of an army brings his men to battle, he needs obedient soldiers who hate the enemy (and even some of the momentary allies).⁶⁹⁶

Referring to the recruitment of others to join the Northern League Bossi declared, "I trust my Padani brothers... all of us must commit ourselves in a truly work of evangelization."⁶⁹⁷ This evangelical call is typical of a close-knit community that seeks expansion through conversion. In this process of evangelization, from early times, Bossi has given the example. He is the preacher who goes from town to town to spread the gospel of the League. Bossi has always encouraged regular rallies that he personally attends. "I like to be in the middle of the crowd," he says

Those simple meetings with my people, with the children who ask for autographs and want to take a picture with me. I'm not divine, mind you. But in me the people see a hope, the dream of change. I'm happy if they love me because in reality they love the idea that I represent. As long as the people are with me, I will have the strength to fight the mafia of Rome.⁶⁹⁸

In fact this regular presence of Bossi in the middle of "his people" is a crucial driving force in the development of dynamics of personal devotion between the leader and the followers. "Umberto Bossi is charismatic," notes Filippo Pozzi, "because firstly he does not cut efforts in the work for the freedom of Padania." "As a consequence," Pozzi added, "he is the first to give the example to his militants and to the people of Padania."⁶⁹⁹ In an interview, the Federal Coordinator of the Padania Youth, Paolo Grimoldi, referred to these ceaseless personal contacts between Bossi and the militants as a crucial feature of the leader's charisma. According to Grimoldi,

The militants love him because after every rally he spends hours and hours giving autographs, taking photos, speaking with every single voter or any bystander who walks by him. Two hours after the rally, and after being two hours in the middle of the people, he finally goes eating with the militants of the place and entertains himself speaking about politics, the structure of the party and even frivolities with all the militants of the province. I have to tell you that he is very friendly and loves speaking about everything. Around four a.m. he goes back home sometimes with hours of trip in front of him... Almost every night he is in a different angle of Padania at rallies: he doesn't go only to big cities but even the small and very small villages.⁷⁰⁰

⁶⁹⁶ "Le due anime del Movimento," in *La Padania*, January 9, 2000.

⁶⁹⁷ "Umberto Bossi, intervento al 3 Congresso Federale 1997," *op.cit.*

⁶⁹⁸ "Bossi, Umberto and Daniele Vimercati, *Vento dal Nord*, *op.cit.*, p.67.

⁶⁹⁹ Filippo Pozzi, Segretario Politica Federale, Interview with the author, May 13, 2004.

⁷⁰⁰ Paolo Grimoldi, Interview, April 14, 2004.

A similar view is expressed by Matteo Salvini:

Umberto Bossi does politics, in the middle of the people, for a long time, touring markets, cities, festivals, dining until the early hours of the day side by side with the young and the elderly. I don't know any other leader, men, not to mention ministers, who stay up until 3 am talking about what goes on in Rome with people who until that moment were perfect strangers ... Because of this I think that between Bossi and "his people" there is a unique relationship, formed during years after years of personal relations and not invented by the television.⁷⁰¹

Along with making a physical connection to his followers, Bossi's regular presence in the midst of the people testifies to his personal commitment and sacrifice to the community. In the eyes of his followers he personifies the all-consuming mission that he demands of all members of the vanguard. This aspect of Bossi's leadership is emphasized in the literature of the party. As written in *La Padania*,

Two-and-a-half million kilometers. This is [the number of kilometers] traveled by Bossi since he started in politics. And they keep increasing because even in these days the word 'vacation' does not belong to his vocabulary; the agenda of the secretary of the Northern League is full of appointments all over the four angles of Padania. Conventions, meetings, but mostly rallies at the festivals of the *Carroccio* [Northern League].⁷⁰²

• Charisma

As I have tried to show, within the narrative and imagination of the Northern League, Umberto Bossi is a Salvationist leader who has through the years developed a charismatic missionary aura. He presents himself and is perceived by the vanguard as the messianic leader of a mission of redemption. His level of charisma is rooted more deeply than the more common and superficial "popular level" of charisma. It is intimately linked with an

⁷⁰¹ Matteo Salvini, Direttore Radio Padania Libera, Interview with the author, July 6, 2004.

⁷⁰² "Dagli scontri di Genova alle bombe: una 'Regia' dietro le intimidazioni," in *La Padania*, August 1, 2002.

enclave mentality that Bossi has been able to inculcate within his militants. Although the general electoral support for the Northern League has dwindled in recent years the devotional support of the core militancy has remained stable. No matter what the tactical changes are, they follow Bossi's guidance. This chapter has focused exclusively on his charismatic missionary relationship with this core militancy. I have tried to show that in order to remain, this type of charisma demands constant work of maintenance and preservation. The work of what I have called the "Bossi industry" coupled with the constant ritualization of the movement, has played and continues to play a fundamental role in keeping the loyalty of the core of militants, who remain devoted to their leader despite any setbacks or changes in party policy.

3.3 The Succession of the Charismatic Leader

Succession, as Weber noted, is always the test of the strength of a charismatic organization which, by definition, relies on the personality of its leader for its cohesion. The Northern League is not exception. Although after being re-elected by acclamation as Federal Secretary in the 2002 Federal Congress of the Northern League Bossi expressed his desire to step down as a leader after the mandate, he has never anointed a successor. In March 2004, he suffered heart failure and remained in drug-induced coma for a considerable period.⁷⁰³ The reaction of the militancy and officials of the party to Bossi's absence represents one more testimony of Bossi's absolute centrality for the community of men and women that he has led for the last two decades. The Group Catholics of Padania organized a prayer session in the abbey of Pontida where the militants prayed for the recovery of the "Capo."⁷⁰⁴

All of the officials of the party professed their allegiance to the absent leader. Giampaolo Gobbo, a Northern League member of the European parliament declared at a rally that Bossi was an all-but-impossible leader to follow, saying, "we must only follow his teaching. There are no triumvirates or quadrumvirates, after Bossi there is only

⁷⁰³ "Malore per Umberto Bossi, Trasportato in ospedale," in *La Repubblica*, March 11, 2004.

Bossi.”⁷⁰⁵ In an open letter to *La Padania* wrote that “Significantly, Bossi’s health problems were interpreted as the direct consequence of his total and unconditional commitment to the Northern League. As written by Gigi Moncalvo Bossi uses “his own energy and power not for himself but for the idealistic battle in which he believes” because “he only looks at the good of the League never his own good, even putting at risk his own health as recent events showed.”⁷⁰⁶ In an open letter to Bossi, Stefano Stefani, long time Northern League official Stefano Stefani said,

Not even the strongest of men is able to make tenth of rallies in a month, which last hour after hour, and which only end after you spend even more hours in the middle of the militants until late night. You put up with kilometers after kilometers crossing Italy in order to be always in contact with the people, with your people ... I’ll tell you another thing, one more time: you cannot, after tiring hours of work in the parliament, stay up at night working and writing ... even the strongest of men is not, unfortunately, indestructible. Come back soon to us because, as everybody knows, you are the League.”⁷⁰⁷

The reaction of the rank-and-file to the problems of the leader offers a powerful example of the emotional attachment to the leader. Here are a few examples taken from the party daily.

Good Easter condottiere, who lays in the bed of an hospital, there is no one like you in the confines of Italy, like Christ who resuscitated from the sepulcher, you, reinvigorated, will guide us in the fight against all the troubles spread among us by Islam; You will manage to win this tough battle and you will come back stronger to guide us towards the Freedom of Yours [sic] and Ours [sic] Padania; Get well soon our great condottiere to guide us towards Padania, free at last.⁷⁰⁸

One of the readers of *La Padania* compared Bossi to “Gandhi who for years has enlightened our common path.”⁷⁰⁹ “At the same time, and as a strong indication of the authority of the Messianic figure of Bossi, the Northern League officials promised to follow scrupulously the guidelines of the movement that Bossi traced before he fell ill. Roberto Castelli, Northern League Minister of Justice, observed that Bossi “as usual, had

⁷⁰⁴ “Oggi alle 15 tutti nella Pontida che ama tanto,” *La Padania*, March 14, 2004.

⁷⁰⁵ “Ieri sera fiaccolata a Belluno prima dei discorsi di Castelli e Gobbon (ci doveva essere anche il leader),” in *La Stampa*, March 13, 2004.

⁷⁰⁶ “Nel nome di Umberto Bossi: ‘tutti per uno, uno per tutti,’” *La Padania*, May 30, 2004.

⁷⁰⁷ “Voglio dirti che ...” in *La Padania*, March 12, 2004.

⁷⁰⁸ Issues from March 12 to April 11, 2004, *La Padania*.

⁷⁰⁹ *La Padania*, October 5, 2004.

established the course for the movement among very precise coordinates [and that] all we have to do is to follow coherently those coordinates in the expectation of his return.”⁷¹⁰

Senator Calderoli even noted that Bossi would be proud of the performance of the officials in his absence: “[Bossi] has always warned us about some of the surprises and traps that might come from some allies, he has prepared us... he has delineated different scenarios. I have to say that when he returns he will be satisfied with the degree of maturity of the executive class of the League.”⁷¹¹ Although doubts about his full recovery remain, Bossi was placed at the top of the Northern League slate for the European Parliamentary elections of June 2004.⁷¹² After these elections, due to his ailing condition, Bossi resigned as minister of reforms and assumed the seat he won in the European Parliament; he was replaced by another League official, Roberto Calderoli. It is noteworthy that during his health-related absence, Bossi maintained contacts with his followers: Although physically impaired, he has addressed meetings of *leghisti* through phone calls which have invariably met an emotional response from the audience;⁷¹³ at the same time, the party gave the followers the leader’s address in order to promote an epistolary relationship between Bossi and his militants.⁷¹⁴

Giancarlo Giorgetti declared that the Northern League could survive without Bossi’s leadership but “it would lose its current importance in the political arena. There is no leader charismatic enough who could substitute Bossi in the party.”⁷¹⁵ This episode serves to show yet again how strong the dependence of the movement is upon the charismatic leadership of Umberto Bossi. His succession and its consequences remain an open question for the future of the Northern League.

⁷¹⁰ “Avanti sulla strada tracciata da Bossi,” in *La Padania*, March 28, 2000.

⁷¹¹ “La Lega va avanti più unita che mai,” in *La Padania*, April 2, 2004.

⁷¹² “Europa, Bossi capolista in tutte le circoscrizioni,” in *La Repubblica*, May 1, 2004.

⁷¹³ “Vi parlo da un letto d’ospedale: cercano de far cadere il governo per non attuare le riforme, ma io voglio tornare per vedere la Padania libera,” in *La Stampa*, August 2, 2004.

⁷¹⁴ www.leganord.com

⁷¹⁵ Giancarlo Giorgetti, Segretario Nazionale Lega Lombarda, Interview with the author, May 19, 2004.

4. The Missionary Model – Politics as Salvation

In his political life Umberto Bossi has emphasized his rejection of generalized or state-sponsored Salvationist projects for humankind. He has always referred to them as Jacobin utopias. At their basis is what he sees as immoderate optimism. “It is rooted in ideological or religious utopias,” he observed. “The Marxists saw in communism a lay miracle, the creation of a new man. An obvious excess of optimism as history as demonstrated ... [The project of] Federalism does not believe in the new man, utopian idea that often assigns the State the task of imposing a new morality with Stalinist methods.”⁷¹⁶ For him, those who push globalization suffer from the same utopian “symptom,” the imposition of an artificial project that seeks to redefine man’s behavior and the structure of societies. Globalists are many times derided as children of the Enlightenment.

However, the fact of the matter is that in the discourse of the Northern League, both verbal and symbolic, politics plays a Salvationist role. A large conception of politics has fuelled the action and behavior of the vanguard led by Bossi from the beginning. Politics is the sacred tool through which a new era will be opened in History. As Bossi said at a rally in Pontida, “After having creating the Northern League, a political movement that merges in itself the autonomous will of the peoples of the North, the epoch of great politics can now be initiated, the epoch in which our federalist ideal can spread its wings and project itself from our consciences to those of the citizens.”⁷¹⁷ This redemptive function of politics is present throughout the discourse of Bossi. “The League has the honesty and the courage,” wrote Bossi in a letter to his militants, “to transform the ideas of the people in projects, through the League politics is indeed the only tool that people have in order to make themselves matter.”⁷¹⁸

The vanguard is fuelled by a visionary project of transforming society. As stated by Bossi, “the decisive element of the revolution is not violence but it is the project. That

⁷¹⁶ Bossi, Umberto, *La Rivoluzione*, *op.cit.*, pp.162,163.

⁷¹⁷ “Discorso di Pontida,” *Lombardia Autonomista*, June 1991.

⁷¹⁸ “Lega, il motore del cambiamento,” in *La Padania*, May 5, 2002.

is, the vision of a new order that substitutes the previous one. This distinguishes the revolution from revolt, which lacks any objective.”⁷¹⁹ Through its radical politics the League will inaugurate a new chapter in History. As stressed by Bossi in his book *La Rivoluzione* (The Revolution),

It is a great revolutionary design that is proposed by the League... It is only necessary to make an inventory of the revolutions in the last three centuries to understand that the federalist revolution it is part of it. Rather, in the history of unified Italy it is perhaps the most radical and decisive, because it deals with all aspects of the social, cultural and economic life. It is not a jest.⁷²⁰

Bossi has repeatedly emphasized the life-changing nature of the political project of the Northern League. For him,

It must be clear to everyone that the League is not a product of power or, even worse, of low politics. The League, on the contrary, is not only a formidable phenomenon of historical nature but is above all a catalyst that has demonstrated itself able to accelerate time. The League can be defined, without emphasis or arrogance as a force of nature. And it has confirmed this, first by disrupting the basis of partitocracy, but also by opening a new chapter in history. And this chapter has one name only, the name of the greatest democratic revolution: Its name is federalism.⁷²¹

Ultimately, the model of society for which the Northern League fights for extends beyond the borders of Padania and even Italy. It has a universalistic dimension. As declared by Bossi in a speech in Pontida,

We know that the federalist battle is not a battle for the bell tower, is not a battle for the Lombardy, is not even a battle for the north, which has to do only with the north, is not even a battle solely for our country, it is a bigger battle ... Federalism is the road, the fundamental choice, the priority [road] so that the world have a future. The one who fights for freedom and justice fights not for a certain type of man but for all men. Pontida represents the fight of all men for freedom and justice in the world.⁷²²

At the very basis of this conception of politics as a redemptive instrument is a voluntaristic vision of History. The power of Bossi’s vision and the efforts of the loyal vanguard can reverse trends and introduce change. Reflecting on the trend towards multiracial societies in the West, Bossi said, “I’m not convinced that this is inevitable ...

⁷¹⁹ Bossi, Umberto, *La Rivoluzione*, op.cit, p.12,13.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid*, p.11.

⁷²¹ “Intervento del Segretario Federale,” Venice September 15, 2002.

I think we should rebel against this 'ineluctability'."⁷²³ As he declared at a rally in Venice,

Some say that it is too late to save our home: Individualism, profitability, the failure of *Risorgimento* have put to death our Padania. Someone told me a few months ago at a rally "you are right. Unfortunately today we can only lower our hats in front of the death of our land." I told him that we should not resign ourselves, that he had uttered the same sentence with which Nelson Mandela had pushed and lifted South Africa to the conquest of its own dignity and freedom ... after death, life. This is my interpretation.⁷²⁴

Bossi has put forward a framework in which his vanguard is on a path toward salvation. He repeatedly defines the political activity of his movement as a "long march."⁷²⁵ In the literature of the Northern League, the various interventions of Bossi over the years in Pontida, the sanctuary of the movement, are described as gradual levels on the long journey towards the "freedom of Padania."⁷²⁶ In this march, routine political fights are viewed as if they were Armageddon. The community is involved in a never-ending twilight battle with powerful enemies, hell-bent in their destruction, be they the corrupt centralist forces of Rome, the tyrannical European Union or the materialistic forces of globalization. In the narrative of Bossi this apocalyptic battle is viewed through a good-evil spectrum. The moral goodness of his community is repeatedly emphasized. The vanguard is good, just, and moral. They have taken upon their shoulders a collective mission of salvation. They are the natural defenders of the roots, history and tradition of the north of Italy and, in principle, of the future of humanity. In the description of their enemies, images of corruption, perversion, obscurity and subversion of what is natural are common.

In Bossi's discourse this confrontation leads inevitably to an either-or final scenario. This has been a recurrent image in Bossi's discourse over the years: "If the League is defeated in Italy, it is the end of its European culture and the victory of the culture of mafia. Federalism is the last stand"⁷²⁷; "The League recovers the roots [of the

⁷²² "Discorso di Umberto Bossi a Pontida," *Lombardia Autonomista*, June 1993,

⁷²³ Bossi, Umberto with Daniele Vimercati, *Vento dal Nord*, *op.cit.*, p.148.

⁷²⁴ "Intervento del Segretario Federale," Venice, September 21, 2003.

⁷²⁵ See, for example, "Discorso di Bossi a Pontida, 1991," *op.cit.*

⁷²⁶ See, for example, the issue of *La Padania*, April 30, 2003.

⁷²⁷ Bossi, Umberto with Daniele Vimercati, *La Rivoluzione*, *op.cit.*, p.216.

north of Italy] and is committed to the final battle at the end of which there will be no prisoners: the Padania or the Roman State, one of the two will succumb.”⁷²⁸ “We know that either we succeed and win our grandiose battle, or the lights of federalism will be spent for a long time.”⁷²⁹ Therefore, the political fight is incessantly framed in terms of absolutes. The battle of the Northern League against the forces of globalization is described in the same absolute way. For Bossi,

The Northern League is the sun of the peoples who do not accept to endure the criminal design of the occult powers, those few ‘illuminati’ who want to impose one state, one race, one government, through aberrant tools such as cloning, the rights of adoption to homosexual couples, the destruction of the natural family and the invasion of immigrants. We stand for what is natural. The Left, the caretakers of the occult powers and of the great international economy, is sided with the artificial.⁷³⁰

As I have tried to demonstrate, along this path towards salvation Bossi plays the role of the missionary leader of a monolithic community united around their leader. No matter what the instructions of the leader are, no matter what sacrifices he demands for the concretization of the collective mission, the vanguard follows him because they recognize in him the missionary charismatic leader with the necessary qualities to save the community.

⁷²⁸ Bossi, Umberto, *Il Mio Progetto*, *op.cit.*, p.125.

⁷²⁹ “Intervento del Segretario Federale, Venice,” September 15, 2002, *op.cit.*

⁷³⁰ “La Lega Nord è il sole dei popoli e oggi splenderà alto su Venezia,” in *La Padania*, September 17, 2000.

The Missionary Model

A Framework of Analysis

So far I have tried to show the multiple factors that are at work in the internal dynamics of the missionizing politics of my case studies. In this chapter, drawing on my empirical research and findings of these movements, I establish a comparison between the two and identify the most salient aspects of their missionary politics. I will integrate my findings in order to construct a theory, and develop an ideal type of missionary politics in contemporary times.

Therefore, in this chapter, I want to show the persistence of political religions in contemporary European democracies and demonstrate that Le Pen's and Bossi's movements are a newer manifestation of sacralized politics. I identify the different elements of sacredness in both Le Pen and Bossi's movements, and reveal how this sacralization of politics provides a transcendent framework of meaning for individuals within the movements. This sacred framework, based on a narrative of salvation, myths, and rites, generates and galvanizes group solidarity and institutes a moral community in the Durkheimian sense. These cultural frames structure the group and sustain the charismatic relationship between the leader and the followers. I will conclude with a discussion of the implications of current global and societal trends to the future of the Missionary route in Western European politics and with an overview of my thesis.

Elements of Sacredness

In this section I will show how the two movements in question manifest a religious character by breaking down my case material into categories and establishing comparisons.

1. A Sacred Nation

A force propelling the respective political religions of the National Front and the Northern League is the deeply felt premise of the sacrality of the “nation.”

Very little of the literature on nationalism focuses specifically on political religion. Among the first historians who have analyzed nationalism’s sacred dimension, Carlton J. Hayes described nationalism in 1926 as “essentially a religion of modern secularism” that appealed to man’s “religious sense” and offered a “substitute for, or supplement to, historic supernatural religion.”⁷³¹ Since its advent in Western Europe, nationalism has had the nature of a cult with a dimension of worship including rites processions, pilgrimages, temples and a mythology of sacrifice “performed in the name and for the salvation of a whole community,”⁷³² According to Hayes,

Human beings do not normally and willingly give their lives for economic gain. The supreme sacrifice is oftenest paid for an ideal and in response to a religious sense; and the best and final proof of the religious character of modern nationalism is the unquestioning willingness with which all manner of its devotees have laid down their lives on the battlefields of the last hundred and seventy years ... Modern nationalism has indeed been a peculiarly bloody religion.⁷³³

Historian George L. Mosse further developed these sacred foundations of nationalism identified by Hayes, and integrated them into his study of the “new

⁷³¹ “Reflections on the Religion of Nationalism,” in Hayes, Carlton J. H., *Nationalism: A Religion*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1960, p.176 (Taken from *Essays on Nationalism*, first published in 1926).

⁷³² *Ibid*, p.165.

⁷³³ *Ibid*, p.171.

politics”⁷³⁴ that emerged after the French revolution. At the very basis of it was the concept of popular sovereignty that evolved into a true secular religion in which “the people worship[ed] themselves.” Mosse noted that earlier studies had neglected nationalism’s mythic and cultic character: The masses were primarily attached to the nation not as simple rational and disembodied actors but as members of a secular religion. In an important passage of his *The Nationalization of the Masses* (1975) Mosse wrote,

The unity of the people was not merely cemented by the idea of common citizenship; rather, a newly awakened national consciousness performed this function ... The nation in the eighteenth century was now said to be based upon the people themselves, on their general will, and was no longer symbolized solely by allegiance to established royal dynasties. The worship of the people thus became the worship of the nation, and the new politics sought to express this unity through the creation of a political style which became, in reality, a secularized religion.⁷³⁵

Mosse explored such crucial features of this secularized religion as the use of national myths and symbols, and the “development of a liturgy which would enable the people themselves to participate in such worship.”⁷³⁶ Rites, festivals, myths and symbols objectified the general will and, therefore, cemented the identity of the national community.

In a more recent study that follows Mosse’s work, Anthony D. Smith, finds in the “sacred foundations” of the nation both the primary sources of national attachments and a crucial reason for the durability and strength of national identities. Nationalism is “a form of culture and a type of belief-system whose object is the nation conceived as a sacred communion.”⁷³⁷ This sacred communion is “devoted to the cult of authenticity and the ideals of national autonomy, unity, and identity in a historic homeland.”⁷³⁸ To Smith the belief-system of nationalisms have drawn on earlier religious belief systems, from four particular kinds of cultural resource: “A myth of ethnic election; a long-standing attachment to terrains regarded as sacred; a yearning to recover and realize the spirit of

⁷³⁴ Mosse, George L., *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich*, Howard Fertig, New York, 1975, p.1

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.* p.2

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁷ Smith, Anthony D., *Chosen Peoples*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, p.18.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.* p.254.

one or more golden ages; a belief in the regenerative power of mass and individual sacrifice to ensure a glorious destiny, and the importance of commemorating and celebrating the community and its heroes.”⁷³⁹ These sacred sources are at the very basis of the devotion and loyalties evoked by the nation:

Where a given community manifests a clear sense of itself as “chosen” for a task or covenant, where its members are firmly attached to homeland and soil, where they seek to emulate the virtues of past golden ages, and where their members are prepared to make personal sacrifices, if not life, then of time and effort for the future of community and the yet unborn, there we may expect to find a lively sense of national identity, one able to withstand the dangers and temptations of rapid change in a more interdependent world.⁷⁴⁰

Both the National Front and the Northern League foster a deep attachment to a holy nation that is perceived as an original and authentic entity, with peculiar and unique characteristics and features. The nation is not only conceived as an abstract or imagined community but it is *worshipped* as the objectification and concrete realization of the collective will of the people. There is a dimension of “feeling” in this attachment to the nation that should not be overlooked: In the dynamic of these movements, the nation is elevated as the authentic repository of the common destiny, territory and unique virtues of the people, and venerated as sacred. It is this dimension of the “true nature” of the nation – forged during the centuries in a specific territory – that expresses the collective will and sets it apart from all other nations. The centrality of the concept of national “authenticity” – and the collective emotional force and devotion it spawns - for these movements cannot be stressed enough. From this core concept follows the investment of sacredness to the people – also comprising the dead and the yet unborn - to national heroes, objects, emblems, rites and places. One should not be surprised at the emotional dimension pervading these movements. At the very heart of the attachment that the sacred communities of France and Padania demand from their respective inhabitants both Le Pen and Bossi put forth the idea of filiation, of a personal relationship grounded in and authenticated by the love that a true Frenchperson or Padano must invariably feel for one's nation.

⁷³⁹ *Ibid*, p.255

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.260.

For Le Pen and the National Front the French people - defined as “an incomparable alchemy of Celts, Germans and Latins”⁷⁴¹ - is invested with original features, from a deep-rooted sense of the sacred to a spiritual and personal attachment to the land. Bossi and his movement early on emphasized the Celtic roots of the Padani and described the typical Padano as fiercely independent with such autochthonous enterprising virtues as vigor, drive and competition. Both peoples are therefore rooted and original islands of authenticity amidst a sea of diversity.

Thus each movement formulate a geography of the sacred, that is, lands and places that objectify the collective Memory and testify to the authenticity and holiness of the nations. Le Pen, as we have seen, refers to the city of Reims, the coronation place of later French Kings, as the “sacred altar of the homeland.” The same sacredness is invested in the statue of Joan of Arc in Paris and the burial places of the saints and martyrs of the nation -- including the war dead -- the fallen-patriots to which the “community of the true patriots” pays regular homage. These sacred sites invoke the memory of its self-sacrificial sons and daughters, and serve as testaments to the true nature of France as a Western and Christian nation.

The sacred geography of the Northern League emphasizes what it sees as sites that demonstrate the holiness of the nation. Less dependent on Christian imagery than the National Front, it sanctifies the place of Pontida as the place where the autonomy and independence of the Padani is proclaimed for the ages; the city of Legnano and the statue of the warrior Alberto da Giussano, where the autonomist troops defeated imperialism; and the Po River as the sacred geographical delimitation of the homeland. These are the sacred foundations of the homeland, testaments to the common destiny of independence and freedom of the Padania nation.

I will now look at the mythification of history and the self-portrayal of both communities as chosen peoples.

⁷⁴¹ *Militer au Front*, Editions Nationales, *op.cit*, p.21.

2. A Sacred History

My data has shown that in the narrative of both National Front and Northern League the past is elevated to a condition of myth, and historical figures to the status of legends. This call to a mythical history to legitimate the identity of both groups is present throughout the narratives put forward by their leaders. The pre-modern roots of the “History of France” have a prominent place in the mythology of the National Front. The Gallic roots of France together with the fight of the Gallic leader Vercingétorix against the troops of the Roman Empire are an important reference for the myth of the origins of the French nation. But the main reference in the construction of this myth of origins is the historical figure of Clovis, king of Franks who in the sixth century converted to Christianity. This moment is heralded as marking the birth of the French people and its Christian roots. In fact, the city of Reims, where the baptism of Clovis occurred is a sacred place in the imagination of the National Front. As mentioned in a previous chapter, standing before the cathedral of Reims, Le Pen gave his “sermon” indicting the treaty of Maastricht of threatening the survival of France. The life of French martyr Joan of Arc lent itself to a process of mythification by the National Front. The narrative of the National Front permanently shifts the life of Joan of Arc from the level of history onto that of myth. She is above all a symbol of the independence and sovereignty of France. By serving as sacred reference points of the glorious Christian and independent nature of the French nation, both Clovis and Joan of Arc together serve as a visible image of holiness: They are above questioning and, hence, serve as objectifications of established truths. They are not mere images, they *are* France. And they are identified in party literature with the National Front, which therefore is identified with the mythical narrative of France.

A similar process of mythification of history can be seen in the narrative put forward by the Northern League. As in the case of the National Front, the League places emphasis on the pre-modern roots of the collective. The Padania’s Celtic origins are emphasized in order to distinguish the nature and character of the northern populations from the rest of Italy. This Celtic heritage of the Padani becomes a resource of symbols for the Northern League. The emphasis on the color green by the movement together with

its adoption of the “Sun of the Alps” a green, six-rayed Celtic symbol as the logo of the party are part of this process of mythification of the past in order to legitimize the present. At the same time the example and achievements of the original Lega Lombarda constitute a powerful myth of origins for the contemporary Northern League led by Umberto Bossi. Alberto da Giussano, the leader of the communes of the Northern League who defeated the invading troops of the emperor Barbarossa has a central place in the mythology of the group. The image of a sword-wielding Giussano became a prominent symbol of the Northern League. Further, Pontida, the place where the communes swore resistance to the invaders became a sacred place for the Northern League. This is the place where the group gathers periodically in order to emphasize the historical continuity between them and their ancestors of the twelfth century. Pontida is also the place where the leader gives the most prominent examples of missionizing rhetoric. The Northern League has been particularly prolific in cementing the mythology of the group through the incessant production of new symbols of identity such as the Po River, where since 1996 the Padania nation has gathered in celebration.

Both groups have, therefore, holy historical/national figures with which they associate ideas of freedom, independence, and continuity. They embody in themselves the virtue of total and unconditional commitment to the nation. In the words of Smith,

The key to that inspiration [for the people] has been the readiness of heroes and prophets alike to sacrifice themselves for the community – not in a spirit of disinterested love, but with a passionate and all-embracing commitment. Theirs is not an act of noble renunciation; it is, on the contrary, a fervent affirmation of life and love for the community to which they belong and cherish. This is what gives their actions, and especially their self sacrifice, such profound meaning and consequence for the surviving members and their children.⁷⁴²

As we have seen, they also have sacred places where they can demonstrate and experience their attachment both to these symbols and to the ideas associated with them. In order to emphasize the sacredness of this attachment, both groups have created ceremonies where its members solemnly swore loyalty to the identity of the France and Padania nation. Le Pen and his followers have made such an oath in the sacred place of Reims. Bossi and his followers have periodically repeated an oath of loyalty to the group

⁷⁴² Smith, Anthony D., *op.cit.*, pp.42-43.

and to Padania in the sacred place of Pontida. Through these ceremonies ideas become sacred, which adds to their power of persuasion. These ceremonies legitimate the passage of ideas from the condition of arguments to the condition of established and sacred truths. It is an important distinction.

Finally, both groups promote a rival sacralized and polarized interpretation of the history of the nation to the dominant mainstream interpretation. This rejection of the hegemonic and secular historical paradigm serves to de-legitimize the order that emerged from it. There are a consistent reinterpretation of historical events and a rehabilitation of historical figures to legitimize the alternative paradigm of history of both groups. From the perspective of the National Front and the Northern League, there is a negative historical tradition against which the identity of each group is defined.

This negative history has also, in both cases, a myth of origins. In the case of the National Front, all the evils that currently afflict France hark back to the Enlightenment. According to their version of history it marked the beginning of the erosion of the “natural” order of France and the onslaught of the “artificial” and the “abstract.” It is the beginning of *la decadence*: the uprooting of the “millenarian” roots of France and the French people. In the imagination of the National Front the Enlightenment constitutes the “original sin” from which all problems and dangers to France, in one way or another, originate. The tradition of French Republicanism is anchored in the historical paradigm that came out of the Enlightenment and therefore, in the eyes of Le Pen, is artificial and separated from the true roots, desires, and needs of the French people. The National Front proposes to bridge the gap and return France to its primal source.

For the Northern League the evils suffered by the group have its origins, ironically, because they are its heirs, in the nineteenth century ideology of nationalism that created “artificial” Nation-States and transformed different ethnic, cultural and economic regions into colonies within a centralized and oppressive entity. The micro-nationalist imagination of the Northern League favors an interpretation of history that stresses the tradition of autonomy of the peoples of the north, from the fight of the communes to invaders to the federalist movement of the nineteenth century.

The negative history against which the Northern League defines itself is symbolized by the idea of “Rome” which became a symbol of evil, that is, of the

“oppression” suffered by the peoples of the north. It is important to stress that for both movements the dominant historical paradigm became a negative symbolism in itself and furthers the self-image of the group as a deviant, revolutionary, and morally righteous force separated from the mainstream that has been corrupted. By setting itself apart, bounded by a “forbidden” belief system, the outsider status of the group acquires a sacred nature in itself. The group becomes a symbol and carrier of the “sacred history” it swore to represent and defend. This outsider dynamic is of a crucial importance. We’ll come back to this point later in this chapter.

3. The Chosen Peoples

Intimately linked with the concept of alternative history is the concept of the chosen people. The members of both the National Front and the Northern League are identified as the heirs to the historical continuity that harkens back to the beginning of France and the Padania. They portray themselves as the true representatives of the good and natural roots and traditions of their nations. They are not tainted by the artificial, hegemonic historical paradigm. In the case of the National Front they are portrayed as a “community of the elect”, they constitute the remnant few, the last of the patriots. Le Pen repeatedly calls them the most “courageous and lucid” of the French people. The mission of saving France has been thrust upon them. Le Pen uses an active-passive dialectic to distinguish his “community of the elect” from the rest of the French population. What distinguishes the “active France” is its awareness of the roots and traditions of France and, because the active French are aware of their heritage, they are conscious that France is in danger and surrounded by evil forces bent on its destruction. The “passive France” on the contrary is unaware of or indifferent to the heritage of France because their identities as patriots have been weakened by the evil work of the hegemonic historical paradigm. Unlike the “remnant few” of the National Front these passive French have lost their sense of authentic being, they have been brainwashed. They are like directionless zombies who wander in a world without meaning. In this context, it is up to the “community of the

elect” to carry out the mission of national recovery and rescuing France from its decadence.

In the imagination of the Northern League its members constitute a “true vanguard” of men and women who are aware of their roots and character as an autonomous people. In explaining the distinctiveness of its group Bossi employs a consciousness-unconsciousness metaphor. The vanguard is self-conscious of its history and ethnic traditions and, because of this, is immune to brainwashing by outside forces. Those who have not joined the Northern League are usually described as passive, alienated, immature, and lacking the self-consciousness to understand fully that the Northern League is the only force that stands for truth and goodness. In this context it is up to the vanguard to burden themselves with the mission of reminding their compatriots of their roots, to increase their self-consciousness, to achieve a freer future for the Padania nation.

In this way, both the members of the National Front and the Northern League have invested themselves with a messianic function of guiding their respective peoples into a better future. This is their sacred mission. They are committed to something bigger than the sum of the individuals who constitute these groups: a collective and transcendent mission giving meaning to their political commitment and reinforcing group solidarity, as well as enjoining self-sacrifice for the sake of the ultimate goal. This concept of the “chosen people” exerts a powerful dynamic in these groups. By raising the bars of what is at stake – the recovery and redemption of the community – the mission increases the focus and sense of potency of their members making them much more effective than the members of any other mainstream group. This sacredness of the mission of the “chosen people” maximizes their effectiveness. I will look now at the development of a narrative of salvation in both the National Front and the Northern League.

4. Apocalypticism and the Dynamics of Salvation

From my empirical research I draw the conclusion that the discourse of both the National Front and the Northern League is anchored in an epistemological framework of salvation and redemption. In order to emphasize the need for salvation each movement, albeit in different forms, advocates an apocalyptic vision of the present. I will start by analyzing the motion of apocalypticism inherent to these movements and then move to an analysis of its millenarian consequences.

• Apocalypticism

It is worth pointing out that these movements are characterized by secularized expressions of apocalypticism, although in the case of the National Front and Le Pen the boundaries between the religious and the secular are blurred. In the discourse of both movements four logical strands intertwine and fuel apocalyptic expectations.

The first one is a *logic of conspiracy*. Several studies of social psychology have emphasized the “uncertainty reduction” mechanism of conspiracy for maintaining group psychology.⁷⁴³ In fact, social psychologists have particularly focused on a widespread deep-rooted sense of anxiety as the driving force of conspiracy theories. For Franz Neumann in the same way that crises pave the way for the identification between the masses and a savior they create the conditions for conspiracy theories. “Just as the masses hope for their deliverance from distress through absolute oneness with a person,” he wrote, “so they ascribe their distress to certain persons, who have brought this distress into the world through a conspiracy.” He added, “Nothing would be more incorrect than

⁷⁴³ See, for example, Hogg, Michael A. and Barbara –A. Mullin, “Joining Groups to reduce uncertainty: Subjective uncertainty reduction and group identification,” in Abrams and Hogg (eds), *Social Identity and social cognition*, Malden, Ma, Blackwell, 1999, pp 266-7.

to characterize the enemies as scapegoats (as often happens in the literature) for they appear as genuine enemies whom one must extirpate.”⁷⁴⁴

Carl F. Graumann shares a similar perspective when he notes that “a state of anxiety is more easily coped with if anxiety becomes fear, that is *fear of someone* whom we can hold *responsible* for the bad shape in which we are finding ourselves.”⁷⁴⁵

Perhaps a deeper current that can be found in the development of conspiracy theories is a need for what Mosse called “permanent and timeless longings,” namely the desire for “permanence and fixed reference points” in a changing world.⁷⁴⁶ The fear of atomization and fragmentation felt by the individual, a general sense of loss of relationship with an organic whole, with a totality, being the community or the nation, spawn theories of subversive and disruptive conspiracies. Historian Raoul Girardet, in his study of political mythologies has alluded to this longing for community at the center of the myth of Conspiracy. According to him,

[Developed from] and obscure sentiment of threat, testimony of incertitude or panic, the mythology of conspiracy appears at the same time as the negative projection of tacit aspirations, [as the] inverted expression of wishes, more or less conscious but always insatiable. The order that the “Other” is accused of wanting to establish maybe can be seen as the antithetical equivalent of what we ourselves want to put in place? ... That organic unity ... that supreme will where all the particularistic wills lose themselves, that absolute authority, provident, protective ... aren’t they the answer to a certain type of communitarian ideal tenaciously kept alive in the deepest spot of our consciences?⁷⁴⁷

To these psychological and communitarian approaches that attempt to explain the formation and development of conspiracy theories another one should be added, namely, a teleological approach. I see this approach particularly relevant to the development of Salvationist dynamics in both the National Front and the Northern League. I focus here on conspiracy as a powerful unifying mechanism that exacerbates the dramatic moral contest between the forces of good and evil. Because both the National Front and the Northern League envision themselves as the “last guardians” of their respective nations they believe that they face a powerful and demonic alliance of enemies who work and

⁷⁴⁴ Neumann, Franz. *The Democratic and The Authoritarian State: Essays in Political and Legal Theory*, The Free Press of Glencoe, New York, p.279 (First paperback edition 1964).

⁷⁴⁵ Graumann, Carl F. “Conspiracy: History and Social Psychology – A Synopsis,” in Carl F. Graumann and Moscovici (Eds), *Changing Conceptions of Conspiracy*, New York, Springer-Verlag, p.248, 1987.

⁷⁴⁶ Mosse, George L. *op.cit*, pp.211,212

conspire together in order to put an end to the community. There is a natural link between the discourses of conspiracy and apocalypse.

In the words of Stephen O'Leary,

They are linked by a common function: each develops symbolic resources that enable societies to define and address the problem of evil: While conspiracy strives to provide a spatial self-definition of the true community as set apart from the evils that surround us, apocalypse locates the problem of evil in time and looks forward to its imminent resolution ... The story of the apocalyptic tradition is one of community building, in which human individuals and collectivities constitute their identities through shared mythic narratives that confront the problem of evil in time and history.⁷⁴⁸

The logic of conspiracy gives the group a key to understand the world and every evil that afflicts the community. It gives them a model of coherence and clarity. Events are neither random nor arbitrary but are like the pieces of a giant puzzle decipherable by those who know the "hidden truth." According to Graumann, "Only those who 'know', namely the experts, are able to unmask, to disclose, that is, to 'see' the conspiracy and to identify the conspirator(s)." He adds, "he who 'knows' has the burden of fighting the invisible enemy, and he has a mission, namely to convince or persuade the majority that they all must learn to recognize and fight the enemy in all his or her disguises."⁷⁴⁹

The "true communities" are beset by forces typically described as demonic. Many times diabolical vocabulary is reserved for these "forces of darkness," contrasting them with the essentially goodness of the community. These forces can be reduced to two main groups. In one group are the enemies within the nation. They can be either an alliance of the mainstream political parties, the media, and powerful civic society groups and secret societies, or they can be the "enemy within," those who have infiltrated the community to destroy its solidarity. It should be noted that there is an element of anti-Judaic rhetoric in Le Pen, mostly in the form of innuendo about the subversive activities of Jewish groups, that is non-existent in the rhetoric of Bossi. At the same time Bossi has many times demonized the institutional Church, as a force that is part of the conspiracy against the community. This anti-Church rhetoric is flimsy-to-non-existent in the case of Le Pen. Le

⁷⁴⁷ Girardet, Raoul, *Mythes et Mythologies Politiques*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1986, pp. 61-2.

⁷⁴⁸ O'Leary, Stephen, D., *Arguing the Apocalypse: A theory of Millennial Rhetoric*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p.6.

⁷⁴⁹ Graumann, Carl, F. *op.cit*, p.248.

Pen can eventually criticize what he sees as the hostility of some Bishops toward the National Front but he has always refrained from attaching the Church as a whole or the Vatican.

In the second group are the enemies outside the nation. These are hell-bent on pushing for a tyrannical New World Order. Because rooted ethnicities and nationalisms stand on the way of this “monstrous and gargantuan” project, they are being destroyed by policies of de-population and massive immigration. Globalization obeys a script written by powerful and rootless cosmopolitan elites and groups, and has as its function to create a fluid worldwide market, driven by America, with no distinctions between peoples, cultures or ethnicities. Those like the National Front and the Northern League who dare to challenge this project are marked for destruction. These external enemies are therefore allied with the internal enemies of these groups, many times described as nothing more than “sycophants” of this World Wide Conspiracy against the “true community.”

The development of New World Order conspiracy theories – increased with the deepening of globalization – elevates the struggle of these groups to a cosmic level. It gives them the perception of an apocalyptic, ongoing cosmic drama between the forces of evil and good, the forces of light and darkness. Therefore, the greater the scope of the conspiracy and evil, the greater will be apocalyptic expectations.

In order to further the perception of “apocalyptic times,” the *logic of catastrophe* is dominant in the narrative of both the National Front and the Northern League. In his taxonomy of apocalyptic beliefs, Medieval historian Richard Landes distinguishes between cataclysmic and transformational apocalyptic scenarios. Cataclysmic scenarios are characterized by rapid and vast devastation that precedes the advent of a new reality. Transformational Scenarios are equally vast but generally slower.⁷⁵⁰ Adapting this classification to the world of contemporary politics, we can see an “apocalyptic” distinction between the discourse of Le Pen and Bossi. As I have noted in the previous chapter, Le Pen has many times included in his discourse “signs” announcing sudden and devastating events for France. He has often given a timetable for the “survival” of France. His apocalypticism can be considered “cataclysmic.” Bossi, on the other hand, sticks with

⁷⁵⁰ Landes, Richard, “Millennialism,” in James R. Lewis (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, Oxford University Press, 2004, p.347.

the denunciation of the apocalyptic consequences of policies and therefore promotes an apocalypticism that should be termed “transformational.”

Landes also distinguishes between “active” and “passive” apocalyptic scenarios. In some apocalyptic scenarios, humans have a passive role: for example, they await, for example God’s time. Other scenarios depend on human agency. In Landes words, “[active apocalyptic scenarios] places the operative deeds in the hands of a redeemed community of faithful who, either as God’s agents or in ‘his’ absence, build the millennium. Secular apocalyptic movements are almost always active.”⁷⁵¹ Both Le Pen’s and Bossi’s movements should be positioned in the active side of the apocalyptical spectrum: they stress both the role of agency in changing history and the power of will in fighting decadence. However, in the case of Le Pen there is some ambiguity between the role of man and the role of God. The possibility of God’s intervention is not totally excluded in his discourse. His positioning in the active side of the apocalyptical spectrum is not as solidified as Bossi’s.

The logic of catastrophe is complemented in both cases by the constant use of images of disaster. The consequences of immigration, of the European Union, or of globalization are described using verbs that convey a sense of tragedy and doom. To further this logic, both Le Pen and Bossi use biological imagery to describe the threats to their communities. Images of putrefaction, diseases and impurity abound in the discourse of both leaders. It helps to contrast the defiling nature of these dangers to the essential purity of the community. The discourse is constructed to instill fear and to shock which maximizes the power of the messages of doom.

The third logic that increases apocalyptical expectations is a *logic of ultimacy*. The discourse of both parties is aimed towards ultimate ends and “final battles.” It is a discourse of finality. By giving issues the greatest possible size and significance an air of finality magnifies the solutions. Because politics is interpreted in terms of “the world to come,” the logic of ultimacy is intimately linked with millennial expectations. Political scientist Michael Barkun describes how “politics becomes ‘millennialized’” and “ceases to be seen as an instrument for the incremental adjustment of conflicting interests and

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.348.

becomes instead a ‘politics of ultimacy,’ where ultimate issues are at stake in a once-and-for-all confrontation.”⁷⁵²

A dynamic of polarization feeds and is fed by this logic of ultimacy. They are mutually enforcing. A binary rhetoric pervades the discourse of the movements. The political landscape is clearly divided between two conflicting and contrasting poles. The “true patriots,” all of those who are courageous, lucid, and incorruptible constitute the pole on which stands the National Front. This is the side of the *France Française*, (The French France). Against them it stands the pole of the “anti-France.” This pole is malleable and it can include any party, group, or force that is perceived to be in opposition to the interests, principles, and values of the National Front.

The “Padani” are those who are self-conscious about their roots and traditions. They are also free of corruption and immorality. The pole of their enemies is also malleable and it includes any force that is perceived to be in opposition to the group. All issues are interpreted and explained in this binary manner. At the same time, the constant use of a belligerent language adds drama to this confrontation. These movements define what for some are routine political fights as world historical “battles,” and military metaphors and warrior-like images can be found throughout. Naturally this discourse of finality ends many times in an all-or-nothing scenario. Either the community engaged in these “mortal battles” will achieve its final goal or its enemies will prevail. In the discourse of these movements, if not always in practice, the middle ground is neither viewed nor desired as an acceptable outcome. These movements, by their nature, flirt with perfection. O’Leary expresses a similar idea when he notes that “a world seen as inherently imperfect invites discourse that makes sense of imperfection by reasserting the principle of perfection.”⁷⁵³

Finally, a *logic of urgency* is the natural corollary of the discourse of these movements. Because the community is under siege by a powerful alliance of enemies and represents the last stand against catastrophic events in the making, there is a pervading sense of urgency to act in order to stop these diabolical trends and to fight towards the

⁷⁵² Barkun, Michael, “Politics and apocalypticism,” in Stephen J. Stein (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. III: *Apocalypticism in the modern period and the contemporary age*, New York, London, Continuum, 2000, p.458.

⁷⁵³ O’Leary, Stephen, *op.cit.*, p.33.

edification of a new reality. Intimately linked with a discourse of fear, however, is a discourse of hope. In these movements fear and hope are closely linked and fuel millennial expectations.

• **Millennialism**

The medieval historian Norman Cohn writes that millenarian sects or movements he has studied always picture salvation as,

- (a) *Collective*, in the sense that it is to be enjoyed by the faithful as a collectivity;
- (b) *Terrestrial*, in the sense that it is to be realized on this earth and not in some other-worldly heaven;
- (c) *Imminent*, in the sense that it is to come both soon and suddenly;
- (d) *Total*, in the sense that it is utterly to transform life on earth, so that the new dispensation will be no mere improvement on the present but perfection itself;
- (e) *Miraculous*, in the sense that it is to be accomplished by, or with the help of, supernatural agencies.

But “even within these limits,” Cohn adds, “there is of course room for infinite variety: There are countless possible ways of imagining the Millennium and the route to it.”⁷⁵⁴ There has been some dispute among scholars of nationalism on whether or not nationalist and millennial movements share goals and composition.⁷⁵⁵ I hold the view that in the discourses of Le Pen and Bossi, the millennial imagination counterbalances and completes the apocalyptic vision. The apocalyptic dynamics of an imminent “turning point” in time trigger millennial dimensions that can be seen in both of these movements. I employ the term millennium not in the Christian sense of a Second Coming of Christ but in the sense of a belief in a future golden age, typically positioned as an end to the

⁷⁵⁴ Cohn, Norman *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical anarchists of the Middle Ages*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1970. (Revised and expanded edition).

⁷⁵⁵ On this point see, Smith, Anthony D, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, New York, New York University Press, 1979, pp. 14-42.

existing world order, which in these cases is synonymous with the triumph of the movements' nationalist agenda.

Therefore, I share Thomas Flanagan definition of political millenarianism as "political ideologies or movements that propose, not just to take power, but to transform the human condition, ushering in an era of peace, freedom, equality and abundance."⁷⁵⁶ Where I part ways with Flanagan is when he states that, in today's world, because there is nothing "left to rebel against" political millenarianism is essentially a dead issue. As he has written,

It seems that we may be at the end of a two-century-long cycle of rebellion against the human condition. As we get ready for a new century and a new millennium, it is time to return millenarianism to the religious realm, where it belongs. Let us admit that our society, our economy, our politics do and must reflect the basic facts of human nature. Nothing is fixed; there is an indefinite prospect for piecemeal change.⁷⁵⁷

This sense of resignation is conspicuously absent from the movements under study: their dynamics and rhetoric are obviously not geared towards piecemeal change but toward widespread holistic transformation. For these movements there is indeed still something to "rebel against." However, unlike Cohn's Medieval cases, for these contemporary movements, salvation will not be pictured as "miraculous" and will not be accomplished "by or with the help of supernatural agencies." Nevertheless, in the case of Le Pen, as I have noted in a previous chapter, the absence of supernatural intervention is not a clear-cut case. Many times Le Pen gives the impression that his group basks in God's favor. The miraculous element, even if tepid compared to Medieval religious millennial movements, is still present.

Landes distinguishes between restorative and progressive millennialism. While a vision of restorative millennialism tries to achieve a return to a golden age of original purity, progressive millennialism aims at constructing a new and unprecedented society.⁷⁵⁸ Based on this distinction I include the National Front in the category of restorative millennialism and the Northern League in the category of progressive

⁷⁵⁶ Flanagan, Thomas "Modernity and the Millennium: From Robespierre to Radical Feminism," in Martha F. Lee (ed), *Essays on Twentieth-Century Millenarianism*, Praeger, Westport, 2000, p. 4.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid, p.14.

millennialism. However, I should be careful to point out that this taxonomy should not be seen as based on all-or-none categories but as a continuum. The Northern League, while aiming at something unprecedented in history – the creation of an autonomous Padania – bases the “society to come” on an original purity, located in the past. At the same time the National Front, while aiming at the restoration of the “natural and pure” society of the past, has strong “modern” dynamics, in the sense of trying to adapt the modern society of masses to a “true form” of democracy, where the sovereign people rules. It is not a simple return to or knee-jerk imitation of the hierarchy of the past.

We can discern similarities in both movements’ notions of the “world to come.” In their millennial visions change in public policies is not a sufficient condition for salvation. In fact, for them, salvation is total, in a metaphysical sense. In their world evil, because is magnified, is everywhere, and within the realm of evil lie the root causes of their oppression and all the injustice that they suffer. Therefore, salvation implies the expunging of evil. Apocalypticism explains and locates evil. Millennialism eliminates it. As stated by the anthropologist Mary Douglas, “a strong millennial tendency is implicit in the way of thinking of any people whose metaphysics push evil out of the world of reality.”⁷⁵⁹ It implies therefore a work of purification and renewal. The “true community,” constituted by those who are good and just, will be rewarded while “the enemies,” those who are powerful and corrupt, will be punished. This millennial tendency has been left out of many studies of Le Pen and Bossi. In the discourse of Le Pen, we clearly see this call for spiritual renewal, for a “moral renaissance” of France to fight the evil of decadence and degeneration.

Similarly, Bossi indicts globalization for “de-valuating” man and denounces the drift towards materialism, to the point of soullessness, of human kind. He has many times described globalization as the “work of Lucifer.” Members of both movements primarily portray themselves as the defenders of their own groups. However, because of the metaphysical nature of their claims, it is not surprising that they also proclaim to offer a model of salvation for Europe and, ultimately the entire world.

⁷⁵⁸ Landes, Richard, “Millennialism” *op.cit.*, p.347.

⁷⁵⁹ Douglas, Mary, *Purity and Danger: An analysis of concept of pollution and taboo*, Routledge Classics, 2002, p.211. (1st edition 1966).

Both movements, because they ultimately aim to vanquish both evil and all of the oppression and suffering caused by evil, demonstrate a dimension of demotic millennialism. In this redemptive worldview there will be no evil and despotic elites, and the faithful will live in an egalitarian manner within their own authentic communities, based on blood and belonging. This millennial vision is at the basis of the profound anti-elitism of these two movements and motivates their calls for a direct democracy that bridges the gap between the “people” and power structures and institutions. A radical egalitarianism runs through the visions of the new millennium of the National Front and the Northern League. It is not surprising that the “true communities” described by Le Pen and Bossi are models of brotherhood and fellowship where the “faithful” are bounded by love for each other, for their homeland and for their leaders. They are unified, as a collectivity with a common will, common values, and shared affection. They are not mere individuals but *members* of a moral community of the faithful and saved.

This vision eliminates the gap between democracy as practice and democracy as an ideology. This gap has been noted by prominent Political Philosophers. Giovanni Sartori started his study on democratic theory by stating emphatically that “the democratic ideal does not define the democratic reality and, vice versa, a real democracy is not, and cannot be, the same as an ideal one.”⁷⁶⁰ The pure ideal “Power to all the people” is an unachievable in practice. Sartori takes his point further:

In a system of representative government the people actually exercise power (political power) by being able to *control and change* the people in power. With all of this, it is still the case that the original principle is far from being fulfilled: *The people still do not exercise power in any full or literal sense of the expression* [emphasis mine]. What to do next? *The temptation, and indeed the easy path, is to repropose the principle in its purity* [emphasis mine]. If so, the intermediary structures (the representative state) are no longer seen as means of implementation and appreciated for what they have achieved; they are perceived, rather, as obstacles and thereby dismissed as impediments along the path of the realization of the ideal.⁷⁶¹

In the same vein, Norberto Bobbio has written about what he sees as the “broken promises” of democracy that reflect “the gap between democratic ideals and ‘actually

⁷⁶⁰ Sartori, Giovanni, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*, Chatham House Publishers, New Jersey, 1987, p.8.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.* p.71.

existing democracy.’⁷⁶² For Bobbio, “the model of the democratic state, based on popular sovereignty, was conceived in the image of, and as analogous to, the sovereignty of the prince, and hence was a monist model of society.” He added, “The real society underlying democratic government is pluralist.”⁷⁶³ Another major broken promise was the unfulfilled elimination of invisible power in democratic societies. The question of “Who controls the controllers?” remains as pervasive as ever. For Bobbio,

If no adequate answer can be found to this question, democracy in the sense of visible government is lost. In this case we are dealing not so much with a broken promise but with a trend which actually contradicts the basic premises of democracy, a trend not towards the greatest possible control of those in power by the citizens, but towards the greatest control of the subjects by those in power.⁷⁶⁴

Democratic politics works in a complex manner; it is full of intricacies and procedures and creates institutions that, while formed to mediate between the people and power, end up alienating “the people” unable to, in the words of Margaret Canovan, “form a picture of the location of power or to trace a clear path through the maze.”⁷⁶⁵ Le Pen and Bossi offer a positive vision of a “true democracy” that eliminates distant, venal and self-serving elites and, through the identification of the leader with the community, provides a clear mental picture of what democracy “really is.” By doing so these movements combine transparency and popular empowerment. That is why both the National Front and the Northern League have always defended mechanisms of direct democracy, such as the regular use of referendums. The National Front has defended the establishment of a “Republic of referendums” and the Northern League launches regular referendums within his own group many times in order to legitimize the direction announced by Bossi. The existence of a majority electoral system in both countries, instead of a proportional one, only adds to the perception of a “nominal” democracy and not a “real” one.

⁷⁶² Bobbio, Norberto, *The Future of Democracy: A Defense of the Rules of the Game*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987, p. 18 (First Italian Edition 1984)

⁷⁶³ *Ibid*, p.28.

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid*, pp.34-5

⁷⁶⁵ Canovan, Margaret, “Taking politics to the People: Populism as the ideology of Democracy,” in Yves Mény and Yves Surel, *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, New York, Palgrave, 2002, p.26.

This element of demotic millennialism is a crucial component of the Salvationist narrative that drives both movements. We will now look at the “sacred authority” of the messianic leader in guiding the “chosen people” towards the millennium.

5. The Messianic Leader

My findings show that from the early beginnings of each movement there has been a process of mythification of their respective leaders. I have referred to this process as an “industry” because it develops and maintains narratives that sustain the messianic status of the leader and invests him with a sacred authority. The work of collaborators, the discourse of the leader himself and the personalization of the parties play a fundamental role in the construction of the image of the leader as a savior, a missionizing figure of historical proportions. I have detected six key images “produced” by these industries and I will discuss their implications.

• The Leader as the Moral Archetype

In the narrative of these movements the leader is an exemplary figure. The power of example emanates both from the personal qualities of the leader and from his life-achievements. Le Pen is regularly portrayed as a man with a number of rare *qualities* worthy of admiration. He is a natural, driven leader and a gifted, magnetic orator. His perseverance in the pursuit of his ideals is worthy of admiration. Above all, he is the quintessential Frenchman and a true patriot. His life-achievements constitute the proof of his rare qualities. Although he founded the party with other people, he is heralded as the only true founder of the party and the man who, through his commitment, self-sacrifice

and unwavering loyalty to his ideals was able to bring the National Front to the higher level of the political landscape. He belongs to the category of the “great men” of History.

In the narrative of the Northern League, Umberto Bossi is a leader of unique courage, intuition and clairvoyance. He is also a powerful speaker with a spellbinding personality. His life-achievements show that, although he had to confront powerful forces, he was able to create a revolutionary party. Both leaders are the first militants of their respective parties. The story of how they created the parties from scratch and the activism that they have continually showed in the defense of their cause makes them the standard of militancy to which all the other militants must conform. Le Pen’s and Bossi’s lives, together with the personal qualities that they manifested throughout their lives, legitimate them as role models and archetypes of the entire collectivity. In his study on the charisma of George Washington, Seymour Martin Lipset gave a primordial importance to the power of example emanated by the first President of the US. “Washington greatest contribution was to keep it [the army] viable, to command respect, and to maintain morale,” wrote Lipset, “he showed no personal weakness and never gave his soldiers any reason to lose faith in him. He lived with his troops, drew no pay, and rejected opportunities to take even the briefest leave to visit Mount Vernon.”⁷⁶⁶ For Lipset, during his public life,

Washington knew what he was doing. He never used the phrase “charismatic legitimacy” – a modern coinage – but he understood that a stable and free polity required a set of values, a national character that subsumed the rule of law, respect for authority, and a willingness to subordinate private interest and factional conflict for the sake of the larger good. His task was to set an example, to be a model of ‘public virtue’, to awe the politicians and the public into doing right.⁷⁶⁷

In fact, for the militancy both Le Pen and Bossi epitomize virtue and, as a consequence, they are heroic examples to admire and emulate.

⁷⁶⁶ Lipset, Seymour Martin, “George Washington and the Foundation of Democracy,” in *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 9, No.4, October 1998, p.29.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.31.

• **The Leader as the Prophet**

By the faithful, Le Pen and Bossi are thought to be men ahead of their times. They can read the “signs” of the present and announce events that lie in the future. These leaders shed light unto the group; they see what others cannot. In the story told by these movements, different events are relentlessly interpreted as evidence of the leader’s clairvoyance. In the literature of the parties and in the discourses of the leaders it is common to find expressions such as “Le Pen was right,” or “Bossi was right.” Le Pen is heralded as someone who had the ability to “see” what was “unseen” at the time: from the evils of communism to the emergence of a “dictatorial” European Union, from the disruptive consequences of unhinged immigration to the issue of the Islamization of Europe. The same prophetic legitimation of the leader can be seen in the way Bossi is praised as someone who understood the path of history before others: the crisis of nation-states, the emergence of micro-nationalisms, the “chaotic” consequences of Third World immigration, the “evil” of globalization.

This prophetic dimension bestows upon both Le Pen and Bossi an aura of manifest destiny while simultaneously transforming their opinions into dogmas that are difficult for believers to question. The fact that the leader was always right in the past legitimates his status as a sacred truth-teller in the present. If there is recurring theme in the image of the leader as a prophet is the constant praise for the courage to tell the truths and a tireless commitment to, by the use of the “word,” to break the lies of the dominant official paradigm. Writing about the prophets of the Old Testament, Elie Wiesel noted that “the true power of the prophet derives from his moral conviction and from his courage and persistence in expressing it.” To Wiesel,

Anyone at any time may strike at him or humiliate him, and some have done just that. Nevertheless, nothing – neither seduction nor threat – can sway him. He never flatters, never aims to please; he is an enemy to all complacency: he is the bearer of truth and ethical concerns; and nothing and no one can make him say what he doesn’t want to say, or silence him. Should he fall silent, his silence itself bears witness.⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁸ Wiesel, Elie, *Wise Men and Their Tales: Portraits of Biblical, Talmudic, and Hasidic Masters*, New York, Schocken Books, 2003, p.178.

Obviously the context of Wiesel's prophets is different from today's context. But it does buttress the ethical aspect of prophecy that can also be discerned in the way militants perceive the leader's resolution and steadfastness amid inhospitable conditions in the pursuit and exposition of the "truth." This claim is central to the leader-follower dynamic of these movements.

• **The Leader as the Martyr**

The scripts for these movements share a dominant theme of the leader's self-sacrifice for his beliefs and his cause. The respective biographies of Le Pen and Bossi constitute evidence of their self-sacrificing nature. They gave up their own personal interests, well-being, and even their health for the sake of their mission. In the case of Le Pen several biographical episodes are brought up to the fore as evidence. The fact that Le Pen left the French parliament to go fight in Indochina showed how willing he was to put his life in danger in the defense of the nation. Both the bomb attack that destroyed Le Pen's Paris house and the fact that, according to the literature of the National Front, Le Pen "lost an eye" fighting political enemies demonstrate how easier and tempting, in the face of such risks, would be for him to give up. Le Pen, however, persevered. He has many times mentioned the possibility of losing his life in the pursuit of his cause. Even more personal episodes such as Le Pen's losing his wife for another man are interpreted through the prism of sacrifice. A zealot for his cause, so committed to the party, he ended up neglecting his wife. Coupled with personal sacrifice is the theme of public sacrifice. The political parties, the mainstream media, the judiciary, and other forces of civil society, aware that Le Pen represents their only "true" opposition, ostracize and persecute his movement. Le Pen could have opted for compromise with the system and, therefore, been personally rewarded by the system. Although easier, he refused to be an "insider." In the narrative of the National Front this persecution constitutes a "badge of honor" and testifies to the self-sacrificing character of their leader.

One of the most prominent themes of the script of the Northern League is Bossi as the self-sacrificing Son of Padania. Again we find a use of biography similar to that of the National Front to legitimate this image of sacrifice. Bossi is constantly portrayed as someone who gave up a comfortable life, possibly as a doctor, to fight for the communities of Northern Italy. Bossi is described as someone who, from the very beginning, committed himself in a total manner to his cause. Given particular emphasis are the early days of the League when Bossi, despite widespread challenges, financial, logistic and from other political forces, managed to establish his own movement in the political landscape.

As in the case of Le Pen, Bossi is portrayed as someone who could have given in to the offers and temptations from the political establishment. However, he surrendered his selfish interests for the attainment of something higher: the creation of an independent Padania. Because of this “higher ideal” and his refusal to sell-out his movement, Bossi is the “victim” of persecution - he has talked about the possibility of being jailed or even assassinated - from the judiciary, media and political parties. This theme of unselfishness has remained unchanged even during the times where Bossi is a government official: Bossi entered the government not to fulfill personal interests but to fight for the cause of Padania. In the pursuit of his mission Bossi sacrificed his own health. In fact, his heart problems are usually described as the consequence of sleepless nights, tireless campaigning, and nonstop meetings, everywhere, with his militants. Bossi’s suffering is viewed as the result of his missionary zeal. In both cases, images of personal suffering and martyrdom abound. It increases the “missionizing” image of the leader as a heroic and stoic figure who endures great pain and sacrifice in order to fulfill his mission and he serves as an example of sacrifice for the followers.

• **The Leader as the People**

The powerful dynamic of radical egalitarianism that crosses both movements is manifest in the way their narratives portray the leaders as personifications of common men with

everyday qualities, attitudes, and lifestyles. They embody the radical anti-elitism of the movements they lead. They are hailed as the antithesis of the self-serving and self-centered elites that the rank-and-file disdains and despises. Again, the use of biography serves to legitimize this demotic dimension of the leaders. Both had humble beginnings: Le Pen as the offspring of a family of fisherman and peasants; Bossi grew up in the “simplicity and commonality” of the countryside. In the storyline of the movements both Le Pen and Bossi have an unassuming and unpretentious life style. This simplicity of life is persistently stressed. Not only they stay away from a luxurious way of living but also they regularly state that they do not *need* luxury, they do not *need* material possessions. Le Pen, for example, although he inhabits a mansion and has a considerable fortune, repeatedly stresses his ultimate frugal and austere nature. Intimately linked with the image of a “common man” is the image of the “family man”. Whether in party congresses, meetings with militants and other public gatherings both leaders surround themselves with their families. Le Pen is seen many times with his wife and daughters, and Bossi with his wife and sons.

Their discourses emerge as the natural corollary of their dimension as simple people. Their language is direct and many times crude. In meetings with militants they adopt a conversational style, sometimes telling jokes, singing and, particularly in the case of Bossi, swearing. It is worthwhile to note that their discourse even though is conversational in nature it has also a strong dimension of erudition, particularly in the rallies with militants, utilizing regular references to history and cultural phenomena. This mix of informality and erudition provides the basis for a discourse of identity. At the same time their discourse is presented as an extension of common sense. The leaders, because they *are* from the people, have a direct link to what the people really think our really should think, no matter how much brainwashing and propaganda comes from the “powerful.” In this way it comes as no surprise that both parties are identified as the people’s parties because they are the only ones who truly represent “the people.” The demotic dimension of Le Pen and of Bossi is crucial for their strategy of self-legitimation as saviors of the community. It gives them the right qualities and credentials to “guide” the people.

• The Leader as the Party

Both the National Front and the Northern League represent political parties geared toward preserving and maintaining the primacy of the leader and the personal attachment between the leader and the militants. Lately, political scientists have commented on the trend in European mainstream political parties towards a top-down model of party organization and increasingly leadership driven parties. According to Peter Mair et al, “The parties become their leaders. What this also implies, of course, is that the party appears more undifferentiated and standardized, speaking with just one voice and imparting just one message to the broader public.”⁷⁶⁹ However, this trend by the mainstream parties is understood as a *response* to changing electoral markets, and therefore essentially as an electoral tool for the masses.

What distinguishes the personalization of the National Front and the Northern League is that it is part of the *nature* of these parties and has been a crucial component since the *origins*. The fact that each leader was present at the creation of the parties is crucial to understand the highly personalized nature of each organization. Both parties are viewed as products of the leader’s commitment and vision. This image of the leader as someone who almost single-handedly created and developed the party functions as a “myth of origins” for both parties investing the leader with a natural sense of entitlement to decide about its structure and decision-making process.

From the very beginning both organizations were characterized by a hierarchical structure controlled by a leader with a discriminate power to appoint people to different offices. This leads to a personalized structure that creates and encourages personal loyalty to the leader. The mandate of many in both parties, particularly for those in executive positions, depends on the good will of the leader. Both executive committees of the party testify to this personal hierarchy. Le Pen and Bossi appoint the members of their executive committees, and the criteria for appointment is loyalty to the leader, which encourages the development of a monolithic dynamic under a single guidance. Both

⁷⁶⁹ Mair, Peter, W. Muller and F. Plasser (eds), *Political Parties and Electoral Change: Party Responses to Electoral Markets*, London, Sage Publications, 2004, p.265.

leaders are triumphantly reelected in the party congresses by an acclamation that symbolizes the dynamics of the “true and direct democracy” pervading the ideology system of the collectivity. Strong from overwhelming mandates from “the people” both leaders set the party agenda and decide in which direction they want to take the party confident that the militants are in agreement.

This centralized structure of the party is deemed “necessary” due to the power and “mischievousness” of the group’s supposed enemies. Hell-bent in destroying them, these forces many times infiltrate agents in the group to create doubt and weaken its solidarity. Therefore, doubt must be quelled. Every schism that happens is justified within this framework of the “enemy within.” The possibility of internal betrayal is always present within the group and contributes to solidify the primacy of the leader even more, with officials eager to demonstrate their agreement and personal loyalty to the leader and periodically jockeying for position around him. Angelo Panebianco describes a pure charismatic party as one being “formed by one leader who imposes himself as undisputed leader, conceiver and interpreter of a set of political symbols (the party’s original ideological goals), which become inseparable from his person.”⁷⁷⁰ Both the National Front and the Northern League do seem to fit the category of “pure charismatic party.” Even if there is an element of routinization of charisma and bureaucratization, the dynamics of “true democracy” within the party and the discriminatory power and legitimacy that gives to the leader keep the personal and charismatic allegiances flowing within those bureaucratic structures.

⁷⁷⁰ Panebianco, Angelo, *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p.52.

• **The Leader as the Missionary**

The central storyline produced by the Le Pen and Bossi industries, which sacralize the leader, is the portrayal of both Le Pen and Bossi as prophetic figures driven by a sense of mission to save their respective communities. This is the overriding theme in the script of both the National Front and the Northern League. This missionizing dynamic, however, is not merely connected with the promotion or enunciation of a sense of mission. It gains its strength from how persuasively the leaders embody this sense of mission. It deals, at a deeper level, with the issue of authenticity. The biographical dimensions of the leaders and their early and continuous commitment and devotion to the cause lend credibility to leader's claims (or the inner core's) that they have a mission indeed. The leaders are authentic and worthy of being invested with trust and belief not only because they put forward a storyline but also because they embody the story that they tell. It is a crucial distinction. This is also an important insight from studies that have focused on the process of leadership as a "narrative." Howard Gardner's conclusion that the most important weapon in the leader's arsenal is stories of *identity* is confirmed by my case studies of Le Pen and Bossi. That is, "stories about themselves and their groups, about where they were coming from and where they were headed, about what to be feared, struggled against, and dreamed about."⁷⁷¹

But the way those leaders embody those stories – the extent to which they personify the narrative - is crucial; otherwise they risk being downplayed as hypocrites and manipulators which, using the words of Gardner, "mutes the effectiveness of their stories."⁷⁷² From the beginning both leaders have showed commitment and devotion to the cause, many times at the expense of their own self-interest and well being, and have demonstrated that they possess the right and unique qualities to guide the group. In essence, they incarnate the figure of the missionary. This aspect adds a moral dimension to their leaderships. Their devotion, rectitude and loyalty to the group and the mission set an ethical example of sacrifice and commitment to all the followers. It also boosts their

⁷⁷¹ Gardner, Howard, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*, New York, BasicBooks, 1995, p.14.

⁷⁷² *Ibid*, p.10.

capital of trustworthiness within the community, for followers are more likely to accept shifts in strategy or policy only because they *trust* the leader, who *knows* what is best for the community and, above all, would *never* do anything to harm the community. This aspect can be seen, for example, in the way the core militancy of the Northern League followed the changes of direction of Umberto Bossi. The followers trust the leader's strategy because it is the *leader's* strategy. This dynamic is closely connected to the break with the rational order characteristic of the Weberian definition of charisma. It is important to remember the words of Weber:

Charismatic domination means a rejection of all ties to any external order in favor of the exclusive glorification of the genuine mentality of the prophet and hero. Hence, its attitude is revolutionary and transvalues everything; it makes a sovereign break with all traditional or rational forms: "It is written, But I say unto you."⁷⁷³

In the same vein followers are also more likely to interpret electoral setbacks or internal crisis as *tests* to their faith in the leader and tests to their devotion to the community. The follower's perception of Le Pen and Bossi as a leader who is authentic and genuinely committed to the collective cause is fundamental to an understanding of the leader's "missionary dimension" and of the leadership capital that he gains from it. Their authority becomes sacred in the sense that calls not only for a strong belief but also a necessary leap of faith in the wisdom and rightness of the missionary leader.

The Sacred Collective

The actual construction and implementation of missionary politics is based on a paradigm of a redemptive outsiderhood. The group perceives and organizes itself as a separate and sacred entity existing on the periphery of the dominant profane rational-bureaucratic sphere that is ruled by "evil" forces and reliant for survival on the "passivity" and "ignorance" of the populace. This dynamic develops the group's self perception as a

⁷⁷³ Max Weber, "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority," in H. H. Gerth and C.W. Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1958, p.250.

transcendent, sacralized entity set apart from the ordinary world. Though these movements collaborate with the dominant, hegemonic paradigm (participating in elections or even joining governmental coalitions, as in the case of the Northern League), internally they always see themselves as constituting a people apart. This outsiderhood dynamic is never lost within these movements.

1. Narrative and Outsiderhood

The narratives employed by these movements stress the group's inherent uniqueness. As noted above, the members of the collective are hailed as the heirs to a specific historical tradition, a "chosen people" who, guided by their messianic leader, carry out the mission of saving their communities. This reinforces self-perceptions of "exceptionality" that set them apart from the mundane and ordinary world of politics. The narrative gives the group's members an alternative understanding of reality, providing them with a different belief-system than the one promoted by the dominant paradigm. Therefore, their values, principles, and beliefs acquire a deviant nature. They differ from the normative system and the accepted standards of society, which is promoted by the "all powerful." The fact that they see the world through the lens of deviancy creates what Michael Barkun has named a "stigmatized knowledge." This type of knowledge runs counter to generally accepted beliefs. According to Barkun, "by *stigmatized knowledge* [sic] I mean claims to truth that the claimants regard as verified despite the marginalization of those claims by the institutions that conventionally distinguish between knowledge and error – universities, communities of scientific researchers and the like."⁷⁷⁴ This stigmatized knowledge can have different varieties but as my findings on Le Pen and Bossi indicate the overriding variety within both movements is clearly the one of *suppressed knowledge*. Here's how Barkun describes suppressed knowledge:

⁷⁷⁴ Barkun, Michael, *A Culture of Conspiracy: apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2003, p.26.

[Suppressed knowledge is] claims that are allegedly known to be valid by authoritative institutions but are suppressed because the institutions fear the consequences of public knowledge or have some evil or selfish motive for hiding the truth ... believers assume that when their own ideas about knowledge conflict with some orthodoxy, the forces of orthodoxy will necessarily try to perpetuate error out of self-interest or some other evil motive. The consequence is to attribute all forms of knowledge stigmatization to the machinations of a conspiracy.⁷⁷⁵

In fact, in the discourse of the National Front and the Northern League there is a constant embracing of what are perceived as the “taboos” of the hegemonic paradigm promoted by the elites. From the time of their creation they have made their own these themes that they have perceived to be excluded from use, approach or mention by the authorities. As noted previously, the dominant paradigm in France stresses a *specific* historical tradition. The French Republic is founded on the values of the Enlightenment and the idea of diversity and peaceful coexistence of ethnicities and cultures has become the widespread acceptable standard for public policy. From this dogma has emerged the idea of a multi-cultural society, a place where immigrants of different cultures or races form an integrated society. The National Front stresses a different historical tradition founded on a primordial ethnic vision of the Nation, which is constituted by members of the same ethnic group. Society is not an “abstract” group of citizens but a “natural” community of people who are bound by blood ties and a common culture. The National Front breaks the French Republic’ orthodoxy of “multiculturalism” with their heterodox vision of “monoculturalism”. Further, in a break with the dogma of the laicization of the Republic the National Front, as we have seen, puts the Christian heritage of the country at the forefront of its political discourse. At the same time the National Front embraces related issues perceived to be suppressed because they contradict this main paradigm of “diversity,” such as the heritage of the Vichy regime and colonialism.

The Northern League has always held close what it has perceived as the suppressed knowledge of the dominant Italian paradigm. To the faithful, this taboo originated in the nineteenth century with the historical unification of the Italian State known as *Risorgimento*. The centralized structure of Italy around its capital, Rome, and the related suppressing of local economies, cultures, and ethnicities became a dogma for the powerful elites. The continuing struggle of the Northern League has been against the powerful forces hell-bent on preserving the orthodoxy. In this vein the Northern League

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.27.

has emphasized a heterodox vision of history that stresses the continuous tradition of freedom of the communities of northern Italy. As in the case of the France, the hegemonic paradigm operating in Italy is also guilty of imposing an “artificial” model of multicultural society on the “natural” roots and traditions of the peoples. The Northern League breaks this taboo and offers its own model of a mono-cultural society.

The emphasis that both movements give to the creation of their own media and communications networks serves as good evidence of the crucial dynamics of suppressed knowledge that run through these movements. The mainstream media is invariably perceived as the gatekeeper of the dominant paradigm and nothing more but a tool of the orthodoxy. That is the reason why these “heterodox” movements are ostracized, censored, ridiculed, and mischaracterized by the mainstream media, which, therefore, cannot be trusted. These movements feel compelled to create their own media where their suppressed knowledge may be channeled, free of distortion and censorship, to the members of the community. The National Front has created a Publishing House that publishes both party programs, and books by major party figures and Le Pen. It has always had newspapers, magazines, and it was the first political party to use the Internet as a tool of political propaganda. The Northern League has also created its own Publishing House and had always had different party newspapers. It has also acquired a radio and a television channel. The League has used the Internet from the beginnings. Both parties see the Internet as a powerful medium to circle around what they perceive to be the bias of the media. Their websites are many times described as domains of freedom, from censorship and the guardians of the dominant paradigm. We will now look at how the permanent use of rites serves to solidify and make transcendent the outsiderhood dimension of both movements.

2. Ritualism and Outsiderhood

From the very beginning, both the National Front and the Northern League, in order to cement their alternative world experientially, have engaged in ritualism. These repetitive

and standardized actions and events have served both as demonstrations and inculcations of collective allegiance to the beliefs of the group and to the missionary leader, and have had the consequence of reinforcing its internal solidarity. Both movements have provided their militants with a comprehensive system of rites. As we have seen, they regularly organize parades and processions to historical places. The National Front, for example, holds an annual homage to its patron saint, Joan of Arc, that includes a procession to the streets of downtown Paris, Le Pen laying a bouquet of flowers at a gilded statue of Joan of Arc riding a horse and waving the national flag, and a “solemn speech” of the leader to his militants in the Place d’Opera. The party also holds an annual Festival of the Blue-White-Red (the colors of the French flag), where the militants of the party gather in celebration. Again, the crucial moment of the gathering is a speech by Le Pen.

The Northern League regularly organizes majestic parade-rallies to Pontida, the place where their ancestors have sworn to defend the freedom of the communities of the north. The central point of each rally in Pontida is the speech of Bossi. The Party also annually holds three days of rallies in the area surrounding the Po River that delimitates the territory of Padania. These rallies end with a speech by Bossi in Venice.

These rites assume a form of pilgrimages, where the militants go to a sacred place where they spend considerable periods of time together in anticipation of the words of the founder and leader of the group. The fact that the speeches of both Le Pen and Bossi are an integral part of the ritualistic procedures is an essential aspect. In his study of the “new political style” that emerged in the early nineteenth-century from modern nationalism, Mosse explained the power of ritualistic speeches. By making the speech part of a ritual, in a sacred environment, the speech becomes a mere symbol among other symbols. In fact, both Le Pen and Bossi give their most militant, dramatic and missionizing speeches in these rituals. Their words, as stated by Mosse referring to ritualistic speeches of the past, “were thus actions, an integral part of the dramatization of the rite of national self-representation.”⁷⁷⁶ In this manner “[the leader] was himself a living symbol who could commune with other symbols.”⁷⁷⁷ The liturgy of both the National Front and the Northern League, made of processions, rallies in sacred places (truly sanctuaries), flags, posters

⁷⁷⁶ Mosse, George L. *op.cit.*, pp.201-2

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

and slogans, help to invest the leader, as a symbol among other symbols in these “hours of worship,” with an undisputable and sacred authority.

3. The Collective and Liminality

The sacralization of politics by both the National Front and the Northern League leads to a mythification of the party narrative. As we have seen, the militants are seen as a “chosen people,” heirs to a “sacred history,” who are engaged in a Salvationist mission and guided by a messianic leader. While the narrative becomes a “myth” in itself, the permanent use of rites, as we have seen, objectifies this mythic narrative and renders it a matter of personal and collective experience. In fact, through the use of myth, symbols, and rites, the community undergoes passage to what the anthropologist Victor Turner has called a “liminal situation.” This process that Turner first applied to tribal societies but then expanded to post-industrial contexts (calling it specifically “liminoid”) is characterized by a transcendent overcoming of the limits of everyday life and a suspension of the ordinary world. In these “threshold” moments, the ideal “world to come” is envisioned, which produces a sense of intense solidarity, which he characterized as *communitas*. Therefore, liminality is “a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action,”⁷⁷⁸ and it is “any condition outside or on the peripheries of everyday life. It is often a sacred condition or can readily become one.”⁷⁷⁹ Turner has defined the route from liminality to *communitas* in the following manner:

People who are similar in one important characteristic ... withdraw symbolically, even actually, from the total system, from which they may in various degrees feel themselves “alienated” to seek the glow of *communitas* among those with whom they share some cultural or biological feature they take to be their most signal mark of identity. Through the route of ‘social category’

⁷⁷⁸ Turner, Victor, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1977, p.167. (First Edition 1969)

⁷⁷⁹ Turner, Victor *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Cornell University Press, 1979, p.47.

they escape the alienating structure of a “social system” into “communitas” or social antistructure.⁷⁸⁰

Liminality phases and *communitas* can develop on the fringes of the main structure, constitute the components of anti-structure or meta-structure, and are the “conditions for the production of [rival] root metaphors, conceptual archetypes, paradigms, models for, and the rest.”⁷⁸¹ Turner’s theory of collective rituals is too large and complex for a detailed exposition here. But the dynamic dialectic between structure, liminality, and *communitas* is useful for achieving a fuller understanding of the sacred dimension of the National Front and Northern League collectivities. Both communities, through a mythologized narrative and ritualism undergo passage away from daily reality and into a liminal experience in which participants experience themselves immersed in a collective, unified body separated from the main hierarchical and divisive structure of society. As a consequence of this “threshold” situation, both the National Front and the Northern League constitute manifestations of *communitas* that is heightened during collective ritual performances.

We find here the same longing for wholeness that impels these movements, as we have noted before, to demotic millennialism and forms of direct democracy in an attempt to make reality more fulfilling. The main structure referred by Turner is a compartmentalized and rationalized society, where “the units are statuses and roles, not concrete human individuals. The individual is segmentalized into roles, which he plays.”⁷⁸² These liminal movements break from this structure and form a different model of society, *communitas*, that in the words of Turner,

Often appears culturally in the guise of an Edenic, paradisiacal, utopian or millennial state of affairs, to the attainment of which religious or political action, personal or collective, should be directed. Society is pictured as a *communitas* of free and equal comrades – of total persons.⁷⁸³

⁷⁸⁰ Turner, Victor, “Variations on a theme of liminality,” in Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, (eds), *Secular Ritual*, Van Gorcum, Netherlands, 1977, pp.47, 48.

⁷⁸¹ Turner, Victor, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, *op.cit.*, and p.50.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.* p.237.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 237-8

4. Communitas and Militancy

Against a segmented model of society, both the National Front and the Northern League offer to adherents a model of society that is an undifferentiated, homogenous whole where individuals are united by feelings of brotherhood, a shared belief-system and a common will. The internal dynamics of these missionary communities bespeak of the centrality of kinship and affinity for its members. My findings, through analysis of party literature and interviews, attest to this aspect of the parties as a “community of equals” under the guidance of the missionary leader. The communities are relentlessly portrayed as “communities of love” where affectivity between the members is a driving force. They constantly say that they are bounded by love toward each other and toward the homeland that, in their view, has been betrayed and corrupted. They are moral communities that, in these times of tribulation, share a common idealism, faith, courage, sacrifice, and hope in the coming of their version of the Millennium. All the members of *communitas* have a sense of righteousness about themselves and of the absolute goodness of their mission. Those who defect are invariably characterized as “moral failures” and miscreants to the community.

Because of the fervor and solidarity generated by missionary politics, the commitment of the militants is total, which increases the effectiveness of their militancy. In the past few years several studies have shown that, in comparison to the heyday of mass parties, party membership in Europe, particularly in France and Italy, is on the wane. One of the reasons, as stated by Mair and Biezen, is that “as party identities have waned, and as partisan politics itself has become eroded, individuals citizens are themselves probably less likely to be willing to devote the time and energy that is often required by active party membership.”⁷⁸⁴ To Mair et al, “today, however, the most pressing challenge to which the mainstream parties have to respond is that posed by popular disengagement and disaffection.”⁷⁸⁵ The activism of the militants of both the

⁷⁸⁴ Mair, Peter and Ingrid van Biezen, “Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies, 1980-2000, *Party Politics*, Vol.7, No.1, 2001, p.14.

⁷⁸⁵ Mair, Peter, W. Muller and F. Plasser, *op.cit*, p.273.

National Front and the Northern League runs against this trend in European politics where political activism, at least through the traditional institutions, is not seen as rewarding anymore.

• **Group Dynamics, Commitment and Conversion**

The work of sociologists of religion Stark and Finke regarding the formation and development of religious groups provides insights that might help us to have a rounded view of the high levels of commitment dynamics within the Missionary Community. These missionary communities play an analogous role to religious sects, that is, religious groups who are in a high tension with their surroundings. They have norms and values different from those of the surrounding society and many times they are met either by ridicule or open hostility. As we have seen, in the case of both the National Front and the National Front they set themselves apart from the rest of society becoming subcultural deviances. Herein lies a fundamental reason to understand the high level of commitment of both groups. For Stark and Finke, “the higher its level of tension with its surroundings, the more extensive the commitment to a religious organization.” As explained by them,

The higher the tension of their religious group, the less distinction people draw between religious and secular matters: religious doctrines and practices impinge on everything else, defining with whom they associate, how they spend their leisure time, sometimes even how they dress and speak.⁷⁸⁶

At the same time, “the higher its level of tension with its surroundings, the more expensive it is to belong to a religious group”, that is, the higher the material, social and psychic costs of belonging to a religious group. Thus, the group demands and requires more of its members. Finally, “the higher a group’s level of tension with its surroundings,

⁷⁸⁶ Stark, Rodney and Finke, Roger, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000, p.144.

the higher its average level of member commitment.”⁷⁸⁷ For Stark and Finke there is a reciprocal relationship between expense and the value of the rewards of membership. In the case of the sects the greater value they offer in return for commitment is a close, personal and responsive God.

In fact, for the militants of both the National Front and the Northern League both movements offer indeed a greater value that justifies all the costs for the true believers. It is an important insight to understand that the activism does not necessarily represent an irrational or “demential” attachment to the cause. The issue of “brainwashing” becomes a false issue. Most militants express the notion that, although the costs of belonging to these movements are extremely high in terms of emotional-physical commitment and sacrifice, the rewards of belonging to a “true community” that gives sense and a transcendental meaning to their lives alleviates all the trials they have to go through. The fact of belonging to the sacred communities of the righteous and experiencing the power of the collective and its devotion, committed to a mission of salvation as pronounced by a charismatic leader justifies all the costs.⁷⁸⁸ Although a cost-benefit analysis is manifestly insufficient to understand all the dynamics and shades of these missionary communities it does not mean that such analysis should be all together discarded if it takes into account benefits that are essentially spiritual and psychological in nature, even though these are hard to quantify. Nonetheless, the testaments and deeds of the participants demonstrate that these benefits can be intensely motivating.

A related issue has to do with the dynamics of growth and the possibility or not of these missionary communities extend themselves from a core of supporters to the rest of society. This is connected to the question of if the charisma of the coterie can be expanded and transformed into mass charisma. The high levels of commitment of the members of these missionary communities lead them to proselytize and seek conversion of others. In reality, this need for conversion appears as a natural compensator for a movement that although it feels itself world-historical has a problem of validating its own marginality. The dynamics of close-knit group formation demonstrate that any new member will feel compelled to adapt their behavior and commitment to the average of the

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.145.

group. It is the power of example. As stated by Stark, “people take their cues from the example set for them by typical others. To the extent that most people around them display high levels of commitment and express their confidence that their religion is true and effective people will conform.”⁷⁸⁹ At the same time because the religious group requires high costs of everyone it eliminates the problem of free-riders.⁷⁹⁰

Van Dooren in his study of charismatic communities acknowledges a similar dynamic in the newcomers of “spellbound communities.” For him, the convergence of outsiders to the community – who he calls *joiners* - stems from the core militants, who he calls *seekers* (those charismatically committed) enthusiasm who set an “infectious spread of mood in a group motion”, that is, their behavior “attracts the attention of others in the environment who may then either be carried away by the contagious display of enthusiasm or may interpret leader-adoration as the proper conduct in the given circumstances.”⁷⁹¹ In the final section I will discuss some of the contemporary trends that can, on one hand, deepen the enthusiasm, commitment and zeal within the missionary communities and, on the other hand, facilitate the proselytizing of new converts by the militants outside of the missionary borders of their community. Whether such proselytizing will set off a “contagious mood” for the rest of society is outside of the scope of my thesis.

What is relevant to note is that throughout their respective existence both the National Front and the Northern League have consolidated an outsiderhood dynamic – composed, as noted above, of various elements - that has developed each group’s self-perception as an “exceptional” entity, set apart from the mundane and ordinary. This liminal quality of these movements begets perceptions of a “true community” or *communitas* characterized by a different belief system, common values, and a different model of society than the dominant rationalized socio-political paradigm and bureaucratic structure. In the process the group acquired a transcendent dimension and the whole collectivity a sacred nature.

⁷⁸⁸ On this point, regarding a more instrumentalist dynamic within of religious groups see Stark, Rodney and Finke, *op.cit.*, pp.144-145.

⁷⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.147.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.147-8

⁷⁹¹ Van Dooren, Ron, *Messengers from the Promised Land: An interactive theory of political charisma*, DSWO Press, Leiden University, 1994, p.253.

Leadership and the Missionary Model

In sum, my data has shown that there is a sacralized framework – comprised of a mythologized narrative and the use of symbols and rites - in both the National Front and the Northern League that sustain the relationship between the charismatic leader, perceived as a “living symbol” of the movement, and his “chosen people.” This structure, therefore, serves to support and maintain the charismatic dynamics and the missionary community. However, the focus on structure and on its function as a force of integration and group solidarity should not keep us away from the fact that agency has played and continues to play a fundamental role in creating and maintaining the missionary community. This hinges on the question of whether the missionary leaders are essentially strategists who use sacral and symbolic resources in a rational manner for political gain and manipulation of followers or they are indeed genuine true believers.

Evidently, in the process of constructing a compelling view of reality these leaders have at their disposal a full range of cultural resources that help to cement allegiances and mobilize people for collective action. Willner, for example, has noticed how one of the driving forces of charismatic legitimacy is the capacity of the leader to “inadvertently or deliberately tap the reservoir of relevant myths in his culture,” knowing how to “draw upon those myths that are linked to its sacred figures, to its historical and legendary heroes, and to its historical and legendary ordeals and triumphs.”⁷⁹² The vast literature on social movements, drawing from the work of sociologist Erving Goffman,⁷⁹³ has showed how these social movements have always been involved in the shaping, structuring, and construction of social life. By assigning meaning to events and conditions, these “framing processes” mobilize participants and “function to organize

⁷⁹² Willner, Ann Ruth, *The Spellbinders, Charismatic Political Leadership*, op.cit, p.62.

⁷⁹³ Goffman, Erving, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Harper Colophon Books, New York, 1974. To him, “When the individual in our Western Society recognizes a particular event, he tends, whatever else he does, to imply in this response (and in effect employ) one or more frameworks or schemata of interpretation of a kind that can be called primary,” p.21.

experience and guide action, whether individual or collective.”⁷⁹⁴ An important dimension of this framing of reality is, in the words of David Snow and Robert Benford, “narrative fidelity” or the way framing resonates with cultural narrations, that is, “with the stories, myths and folk tales that are part and parcel of one’s cultural heritage and that thus function to inform events and experiences in the immediate present.”⁷⁹⁵

As noted previously, the extent to which the National Front and the Northern League both portray themselves as the true defenders of the threatened cultural milieu of their nations and, therefore, have this dimension of cultural resonance with its symbols and myths, plays a crucial part in these movements’ mobilizing potency. As seen both in their writings and speeches, and through the activities of their respective parties, both Le Pen and Bossi are aware that symbolism and culture constitute powerful vehicles for resource mobilization. Thus, their efforts are in part calculated. At the same time they have seemed throughout their careers to display a spontaneous and genuine attachment both to their cause and to the missionary communities that they represent. Not only do they declare themselves to be true believers; they act as true believers and continue to commit themselves to their movements in a total manner, as “true” militants should. Herein lies, as noted, a major reason that these leaders continue to appeal to their followers. Both leaders frame reality and mobilize resources to maximize their appeal. But ultimately what matters most for missionary politics is the way the leaders are perceived as genuine true believers by the other members of the community.

Roy Wallis emphasizes the need to focus on the social construction of charisma. I agree with Wallis when he writes that,

Becoming charismatic is not a once and for always thing. It is a crucial feature of charisma that it exists only in its recognition by others. It must be constantly reinforced and reaffirmed or it no longer exists. The charismatic leader, and those around him, must find means constantly to secure the reaffirmation required.⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹⁴ Snow, David A. and Robert D. Benford, “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol.51, 1986, p.464.

⁷⁹⁵ Snow, David and Robert Benford, “Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization,” in B. Klandermans, H. Kriesi and S. Tarrow, *From Structure to Action: Comparing Social Movement Research Across Cultures*, Vol.1, JAI Press Inc, Greenwich, Connecticut, 1988, p.210.

⁷⁹⁶ Wallis, Roy, “The Social Construction of Charisma,” in *Social Compass*, XXIX/1, 1982, p.35.

My focus on the implementation and actual operationalization of missionary politics in my case studies has demonstrated how crucial agency is in the process of construction of a reality, an organic whole, that integrates individuals and their leaders. However, although Missionary Politics is a construction, an element of authenticity lies at the very heart of the attachment to the community. Followers, therefore, should not be seen as “trapped” or “manipulated” by the missionary community. They are willing members of the community, in the sense that they are willing of being carried away by the emotional benefits offered by the community. It is not the missionary structure that imposes on the individual his or her allegiance to the community. This structure facilitates and sustains the allegiance. However, it is the member’s ideology, the power of belief, the emotional reality of experience, and the deeply felt perception of the “moral value” of the mission that is at the very root and underpins the allegiance to the community.

The Future of Missionary Politics

My findings from the study of the National Front and the Northern League attest to the continuing centrality of secularized and nationalistic religious beliefs in contemporary Western Europe. The sacralization of politics, which provides a transcendent framework of meaning for individuals, is alive and well and does not confine itself to totalitarian movements of the past. Future studies should focus on the persistence of the sacred in these contemporary neo-populist movements, which might in turn explain the continuous role of charisma as a force in modern politics. There are current trends that have the potential to increase the appeal of missionary politics, particularly in Europe. These trends, by increasing apocalyptic dynamics, might increase the call for a politics anchored in millenarian expectations and a telos of salvation. If the case studies of the National Front and the Northern League serve as an indication, the future promises more missionary politics and charismatic leaders, not less. I will mention here three of these trends.

1. Globalization

Anti-globalization rhetoric has become a primal force in the development of missionary politics. In the paradigm of missionary politics I have outlined, it is inevitably perceived to be a malign project promoted by powerful elites recklessly determined to achieve world domination. In this vision, it is a utopian project, rooted on an economicist vision, and has the final goal of the uniformization of peoples, cultures and practices, all united in the worship of the market. Policies of de-population and open borders are an essential part of this calculated project to disintegrate ethnicities and uproot cultures, which are pictured as the last bastions of authentic human experience.

This apocalyptic portrait of globalization – linked with the pervasive conspiratorial theme of a New World Order - offers a grand narrative to missionary movements, involved in a struggle of historical proportions against the forces of evil. It also increases millenarian expectations. Ultimately, for these movements, globalization is forcefully rejected because it is thought to lead to a “devaluation” of Man. That is the reason why the criticism of globalization within these movements is indistinguishable from the criticism of the materialism and vacuity of modern society. Anti-globalization is therefore intimately linked with calls for a purification and renewal of the materialistic West. This rhetoric for cleansing implies a holistic, not pragmatic, vision of politics. Missionary politics, therefore, has found a fertile ground in its resistance against globalization, which appeals to a larger population afraid of a loss of identity in the anonymous global marketplace.

2. Islamization

The National Front and the Northern League manifest a deep sense of foreboding about the increasing number of Muslim immigrants and see their influx as a grave threat to

Europe's traditional Christian culture. The fear of an Islamization of the continent has increasingly gained ground in the narrative of both parties and has fueled apocalyptic dynamics where the end of millenarian Europe is presented as a real possibility. This theme of the "rise and fall" of Christian Europe replaced by a Muslim Europe has the potential to override, in the narrative of missionary movements, all other themes. Both the National Front and the Northern League have taken the lead in fighting against the construction of mosques and Muslim schools in their countries. The Northern League felt the need to readjust its discourse in a more Christian-oriented direction. One of the most recent electoral posters of the National Front reveals the growing importance of this theme. "Did you like immigration?" it states, "Well, you're going to love islamization!"⁷⁹⁷

One of the dominant themes of these parties in the European Elections of 2004 was the urge to resist the entry of Turkey into the European Union, which is interpreted as a potential cataclysmic event for the rooted Christian culture of Europe. The demographic decline of Europe and the filling of this demographic void with Muslim immigrants have increased the drama and the sense of urgency in the discourse of these movements. The coupling of these two factors, from the perspective of both the National Front and the Northern League, will create in the not so distant future a doomsday scenario for Europe. This sense of foreboding is likely to deepen, producing a greater distance between the "masses" and the "elites," who seem at best as indifferent and at worst conniving with this trend, and will increase calls for political salvation.

3. Europeanization

The emergence and widening of a European Union policy paradigm is likely to increase narratives of identity that see in Europeanization a direct threat against the diversity of continental cultures. The push by the elites to build a postmodern bureaucratic paradise is

⁷⁹⁷ "Le 13 Juin dites non à la Turquie dans l'Europe," May-June 2004, in www.frontnational.com

seen as an attack against the “people.” Both the National Front and the Northern League have positioned themselves against the “Brussels mentality” characterized by the urge to meddle and to regulate every simple aspect of the European Union citizens. Both parties attack what they perceive to be a dangerous and artificial process of “social engineering,” hell-bent on destroying the “natural” roots and allegiances of traditional European societies.

Therefore, the European Union is increasingly derided as a “Superstate” of a tyrannical and totalitarian nature ruled by a class of bureaucrats. In the light of this, European Union-wide policies are nothing more but an attempt to coerce the citizens, legally and morally, to accept their version of society. This perception of a Europe-wide “rule of bureaucrats” has the potential of increasing the gap between the citizens and institutions of power and strengthening internal dynamics of outsiderhood and localism within the European countries.

An Overview

As I stated in the introduction to my thesis my method of investigation and explanation of the phenomena of contemporary sacralized politics was based on the construction of a heuristic device, an ideal type of the kind of politics that I named Missionary. Using the empirical reality of the movements as a starting point and taking seriously what the leaders and followers say and do, I then highlighted the salient dimensions of their sacralization of the political and used that to put forward a model of the characteristic pattern and structure of their collective action. In the process, and using contributions from different disciplines, I define Missionary politics as a cluster concept that gathers similar ideals, goals, and worldviews together. My research within both the National Front and the Northern League, deduced from their internal materials, indicates the following constellation: Missionary Politics should be understood as a form of *political religion* carried out by a *chosen people* who, in a time of self-perceived deep-rooted *crisis*, sees itself as a *moral community* led by a *missionary charismatic* leader

undertaking a *collective mission of salvation*. Driven by *apocalyptic* and *millenarian* dynamics, the community manifests its solidarity and belief in the mission by constant *ritualization*. In the process, the members of the community celebrate themselves as a *sacred collective*, as representatives of a *sacred nation* and heirs to a *sacred history* involved in an apocalyptic showdown with the evil and *conspiratorial* forces of a *new world order*.

As an ideal type, Missionary Politics does not replicate exactly the reality of the case studies but highlight the features of patterned actions of the sacralization of the political and systematizes them into a coherent means-end chain. Therefore, both the National Front and the Northern League, although close to ideal typical cases for missionary leadership, do not replicate the pure type of Missionary Politics that, as an ideal type, will always remain a “constructed utopia.” This leads to the issue of whether other political leaders and movements, from the right or the left, can be positioned as cases of contemporary Missionary Politics. That depends on further investigation of other cases that will determinate or not if they fit the ideal type as well as the National Front and the Northern League and, if not, which specific factors are responsible for the various trajectories. This leads to what I hope to be the major contribution of my ideal type of Missionary Politics, that of providing an heuristic device to guide further examination into the phenomena of contemporary political religions and assist in discovering sacralized actions and patterns that otherwise would be neglected or left undiscovered. In this manner, the ideal type of Missionary Politics should be utilized not only as a “yardstick” against which reality can be compared and measured but also as a theoretical framework, a model that offers hypothesis that can be tested against specific case studies, assist in their conceptual framing and give an explanation of reality. This theoretical model of Missionary Politics might then be extended to other cases and contribute to the field of comparative politics.

My adoption of a cluster analysis approach to Missionary Politics has led me to formulate a conceptual framework that reveals associations and structures between major concepts that interact dynamically and in a synergetic manner. This approach might lead researchers in social sciences to avoid mono-causal approaches that many times capture reality in a reductionist manner. Therefore to have a full picture of the political religion of

Missionary Politics the researcher might look not only at the sacred sources of nationalism but also at the establishment of “true communities” in a quest for salvation, issues of purity and pollution, ritualization, the development of charismatic leadership dynamics, the pervading sense of a conspiracy, among others. All of these concepts, behaviors, and values constitute the “building” of Missionary Politics and all of them play a constitutive role in its formation and development.

Ultimately, my thesis is in agreement with those who reject the secularization theory, particularly its micro-version of the gradual disappearance of individual piety and belief. The examples of the National Front and the Northern League offer proof that faith-based “secular” movements remain strong and may become even stronger in reaction to felt threats to localized identity. Within these movements, the sacralization of both the group and its collective mission is made in such a comprehensive manner that it gives members a way of “re-enchanting” the world with myths, rituals, and promise of a promised land. In this manner politics, no longer a judiciary activity, transforms itself into a sacred worldview that injects a sense of meaning and a revitalized identity in all of those touched by the sacred mission. In conclusion, it seems that a sacralized form of politics, far from absent in the modern or postmodern era, is destined to remain salient, and perhaps even to increase in importance. The primacy given by missionary leaders and groups to the aforementioned global and societal tendencies and to a secular-nationalist form of religious experience, bespeaks the potential appeal of missionary politics or “politics not as usual,” at least in contemporary Western Europe. Whether we like it or not, missionizing politics is here to stay for the foreseeable future.

APPENDIX

In this section is an array of visual materials from the National Front and the Northern League. These images are reproductions of photographic, visual, and literary materials pertaining to either party: Along with photos of Jean-Marie Le Pen and Umberto Bossi, are included party organizing literature, posters, logos, and photographs of parades and rallies.

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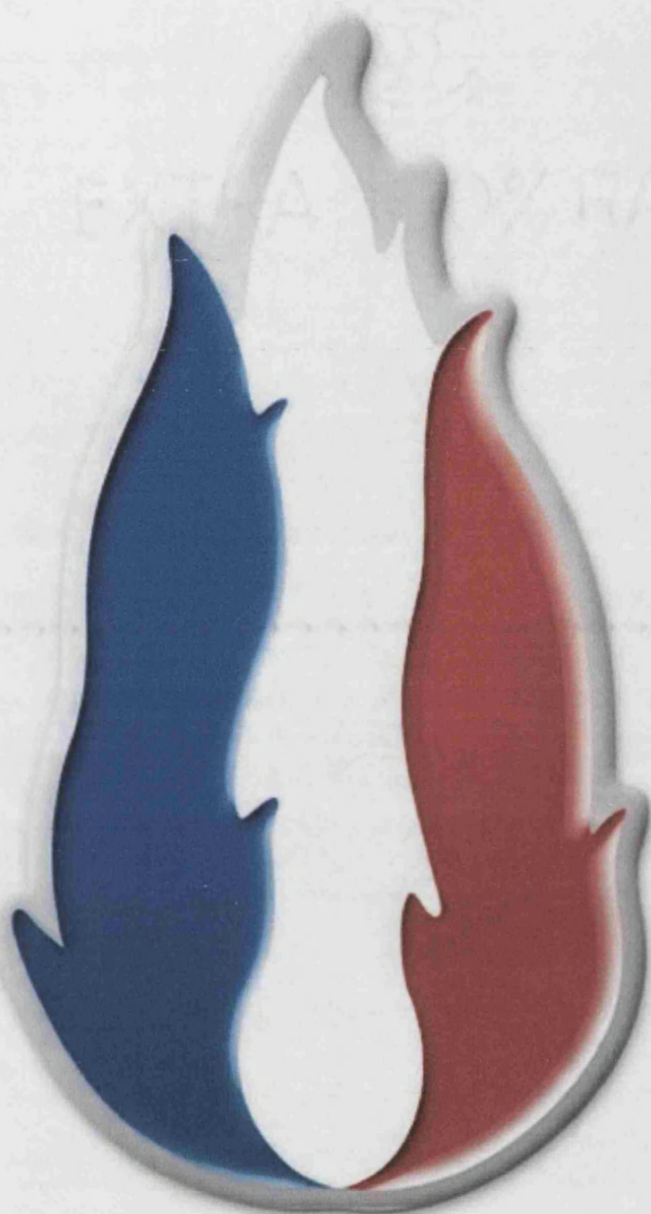
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Figure 1

Face à l'adversité

Quel est votre meilleur souvenir? Après l'explosion de ma baraque le 1^{er} novembre 1976, je m'aperçois après avoir fait le décompte que pas une vie n'a été atteinte. Pensez-donc, toute ma famille était là, même le vieux caniche qui avait fait avec nous le tour du monde à la voile.



Figure 2

LES PROCÈS GAGNÉS

Vingt ans de combat politique sont aussi pour le Front National et Jean-Marie Le Pen vingt années de combats judiciaires, menés grâce au talent de brillants et courageux avocats ! Au premier rang d'entre eux, maître Georges-Paul Wagner.

Dans les années soixante-dix, les campagnes contre le Front National n'ont certes pas le même retentissement qu'aujourd'hui, mais déjà des actions ont été menées contre les diffamateurs et autres hystériques, en particulier contre des journaux d'extrême gauche comme Rouge (Quotidien Rouge à l'époque)... Cette première décennie s'est achevée par un procès devant la cour d'appel de Rennes (avril 1980, parquet de Nantes poursuivant), suite à une plainte du MRAP, relative aux affiches : « Un million de chômeurs, c'est un million d'immigrés de trop ! ». L'affaire se conclut par un non-lieu.

Que retenir de l'impressionnante liste des multiples batailles judiciaires livrées de 1982 à nos jours ? Pres d'une soixantaine de procès ou moins ont été intentés par le président du Front National : ces procès ont quasiment tous été gagnés ! Jean-Marie Le Pen a fait le plus souvent condamner des journalistes ou des politiciens (on retrouve bien sûr l'Humanité, Libération, Le Canard enchaîné, Globe ou l'Événement du Jeudi, mais aussi Marchais, Polak, B.-H. Lévy, Costa-Gavras, J.-P. Pierre-Bloch, ou Record)... Il s'agissait d'injures, de diffamations, des sempiternelles accusations de racisme - nazisme - extrémisme - torture, etc.

Dans cette soixantaine de procès, les adversaires du FN ont été condamnés à verser au total en amendes, dommages et intérêts, quelque 710 000 F (c'est-à-dire moins que le montant financier que Jean-Marie Le Pen a dû verser dans l'affaire dite « du détail » !).

Des droits de réponse, publications et insertions ont été obtenus à la suite de ces différents jugements, mais que l'on pense seulement au bruit, à la fureur de toutes les campagnes et accusations lancées contre le Front National.

Jean-Marie Le Pen a été aussi poursuivi plusieurs fois par le MRAP notamment pour un propos qui lui avait été attribué, datant de 1983 : la relaxe définitive a été obtenue en 1990 ! Dans les affaires dites « Durafor crématoire » et de « l'Internationale juive », Jean-Marie Le Pen a également obtenu la relaxe. Mais qui en a parlé, alors qu'on a encore aux oreilles les clameurs et l'hystérie qui permirent d'orchestrer et de monter de toutes pièces de véritables campagnes de « chasse à l'homme » ?

ILS VEULENT BAILLONNER LA FRANCE



Certains affiches ont connu une existence posthume. Ainsi, après quelques années d'absence, nous venons de découvrir une affiche des années soixante-dix : « Ne laissez pas les autres parler à la place ». En 1984, afin de dénoncer le silence de la classe politique, nous avons dit : « Le Pen, le Front dit... ». Le Pen dit la vérité, ils le bâillonnent. En 1988, sous l'impulsion du Rassemblement national - jusqu'à une seconde édition intitulée : « Le Pen dit la vérité ou le bâillonnement ». Enfin, avec la perspective de la loi des Copains et l'affaire de Corpeillaud, une nouvelle affiche est nécessaire en 1990 : ils veulent bâillonner la France, protestez-les.



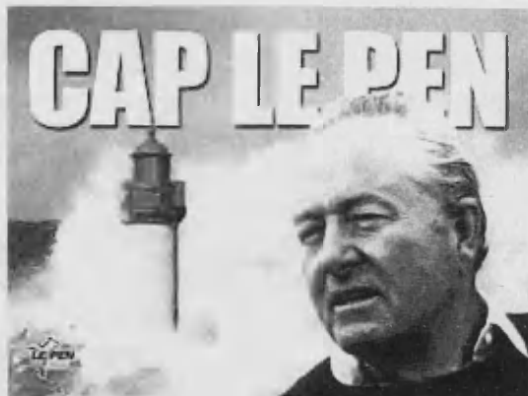
Figure 3



Cette rue du stade vélodrome de Marseille servira à la réalisation de la célèbre affiche « Le Pen le peuple ».

Figure 4

U n e v i e f r a n c a i s e



Juillet 2001, les jeunes du Front national se réunissent pour leur traditionnelle université d'été, au château de Neuvy-sur-Barangeon, la tanière de Roger Holeindre. Ce havre de paix, il le voulut jadis, pour ses copains et pour lui-même, dans les rizières et dans les djebels. Ce fut un rêve constant : faire son devoir au service de la patrie et, plus tard, avec les survivants, avoir, pour toute l'équipe, un château, une ferme, une forêt. Ce rêve, devenu réalité, est, de plus, une sorte de témoin passant de génération en génération, les plus âgés enseignant aux plus jeunes, transmettant leur expérience. Fief des anciens combattants, il est donc aussi celui des jeunes militants. Ce n'est donc pas un hasard, si ce fut le point de départ de la caravane présidentielle de 2002. Une trentaine de véhicules partis pour sillonner la France, témoigner de leur amour de la patrie. Là encore, les âges se mêlent, comme les couleurs de peau, telle qu'en

**Donner la parole
au peuple ?
Je m'y engage !**

Le Pen maint.

**Jean-Marie
à La**

Figure 5



LA CELLULE 1995

S'il est inmanquablement engagé dans un combat quotidien, le Front National ne perd pas de vue les grands enjeux politiques de cette fin de siècle. Dans ce contexte, parce qu'elle est la clef de voûte de chaque cycle électoral, l'élection présidentielle de 1995 est au cœur des préoccupations de la direction frontiste et cela d'autant plus qu'une présidentielle anticipée peut intervenir à tout moment. Voilà pourquoi il existe, depuis 1991, une cellule de travail qui prépare la prochaine campagne présidentielle de Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Coordonnée par le directeur de campagne, Bruno Mégret, et composée de Carl Lang, Dominique Chaboche, Jean-François Jalkh (formalités administratives), Fernand Le Rachinel (manifestations), Jean-Yves Le Galleu (argumentaires), Michel Collinet (signature des maires), Franck Timmermans, Damien Bariller, Jacques Olivier, Philippe Olivier et Bruno Racouchot (coups médiatiques, propagande et courriers), la cellule travaille sous l'autorité du présidentiable, Jean-Marie Le Pen.

La cellule présidentielle bénéficie en outre du travail réalisé par le Comité de soutien à Jean-Marie Le Pen, animé par Michel de Rastolan qui recueille, à travers la France, les signatures de personnalités désireuses de soutenir la candidature du président du FN.

Réunie périodiquement, la cellule présidentielle est d'abord là pour rendre possible ce qui est nécessaire à « la renaissance de la France » : l'arrivée de Jean-Marie Le Pen à l'Élysée !

Figure 6

Jean - M a r i e L e P e n



eux qui, un jour ou
dans leur vie, ont
u le drapeau d'une
commune, ont mis
au bout de leurs
une certaine forme
iplicité demeure.
es de mains entre
es.

le chantait
es Brassens : "Un p'tit
sarapluie, contre un
saradlis..."



Figure 7

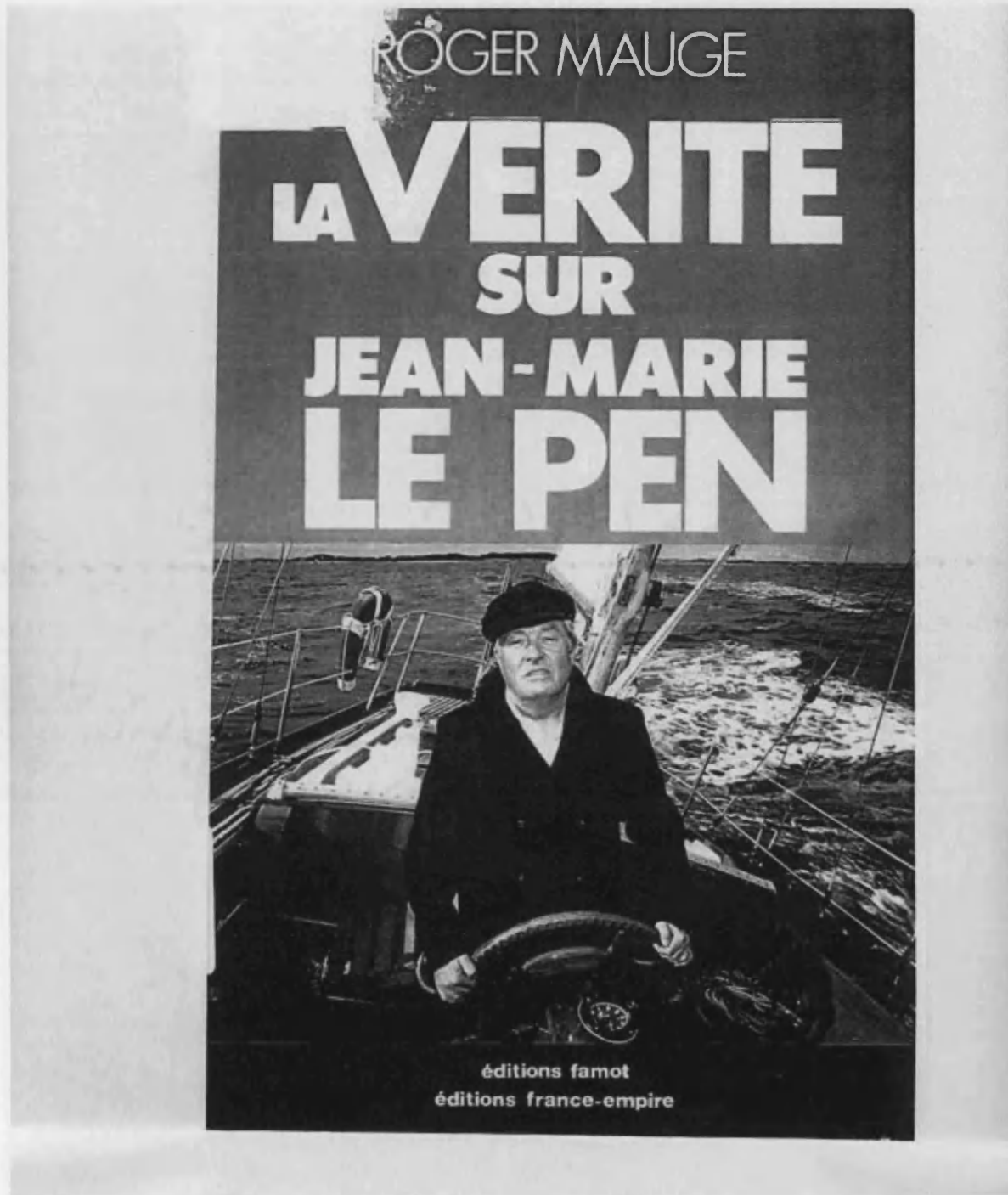


Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Jean-
Marie

Le Pen

à FDA



“Aucun
bien n'est
plus précieux que l'indépendance”

Figure 14

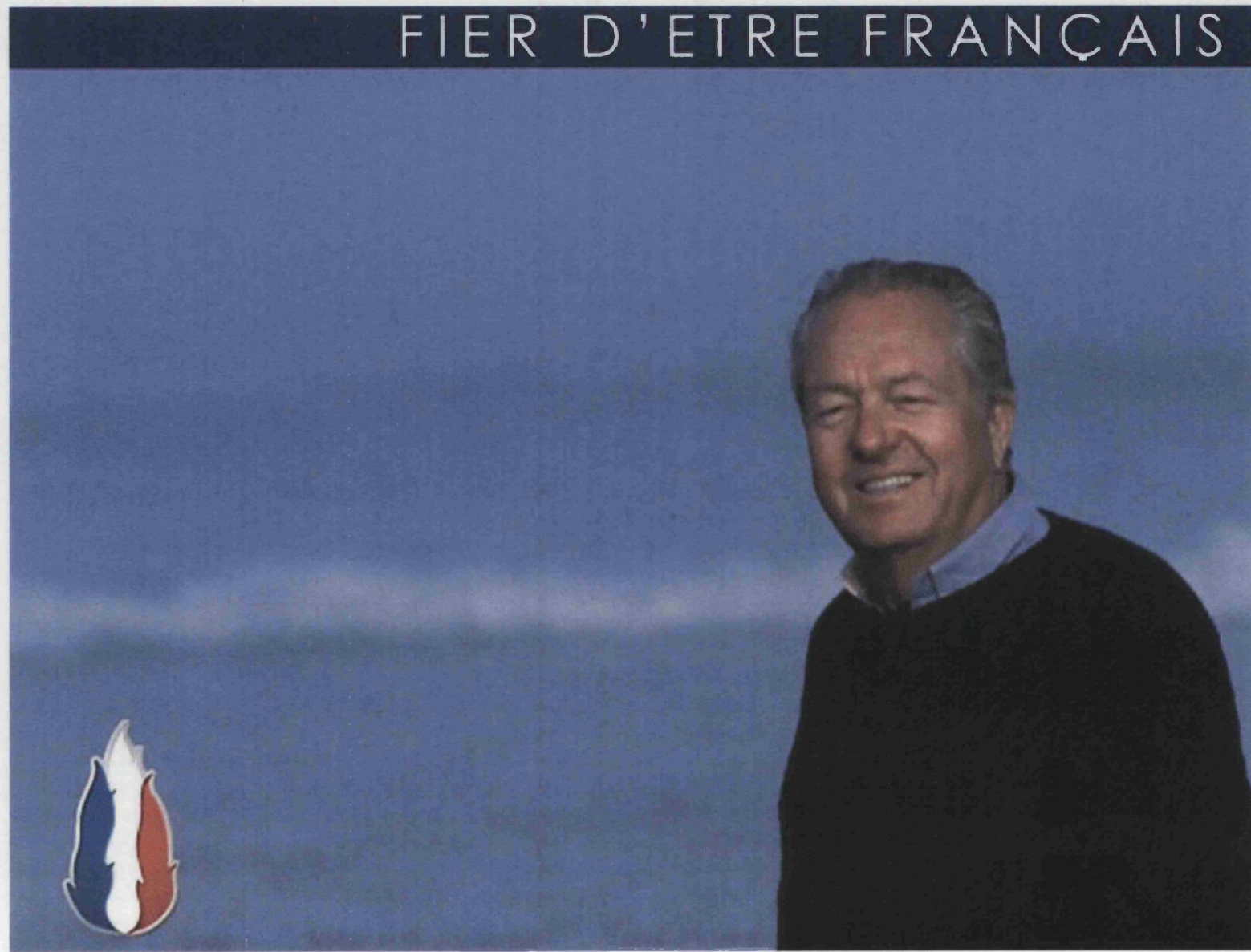


Figure 15

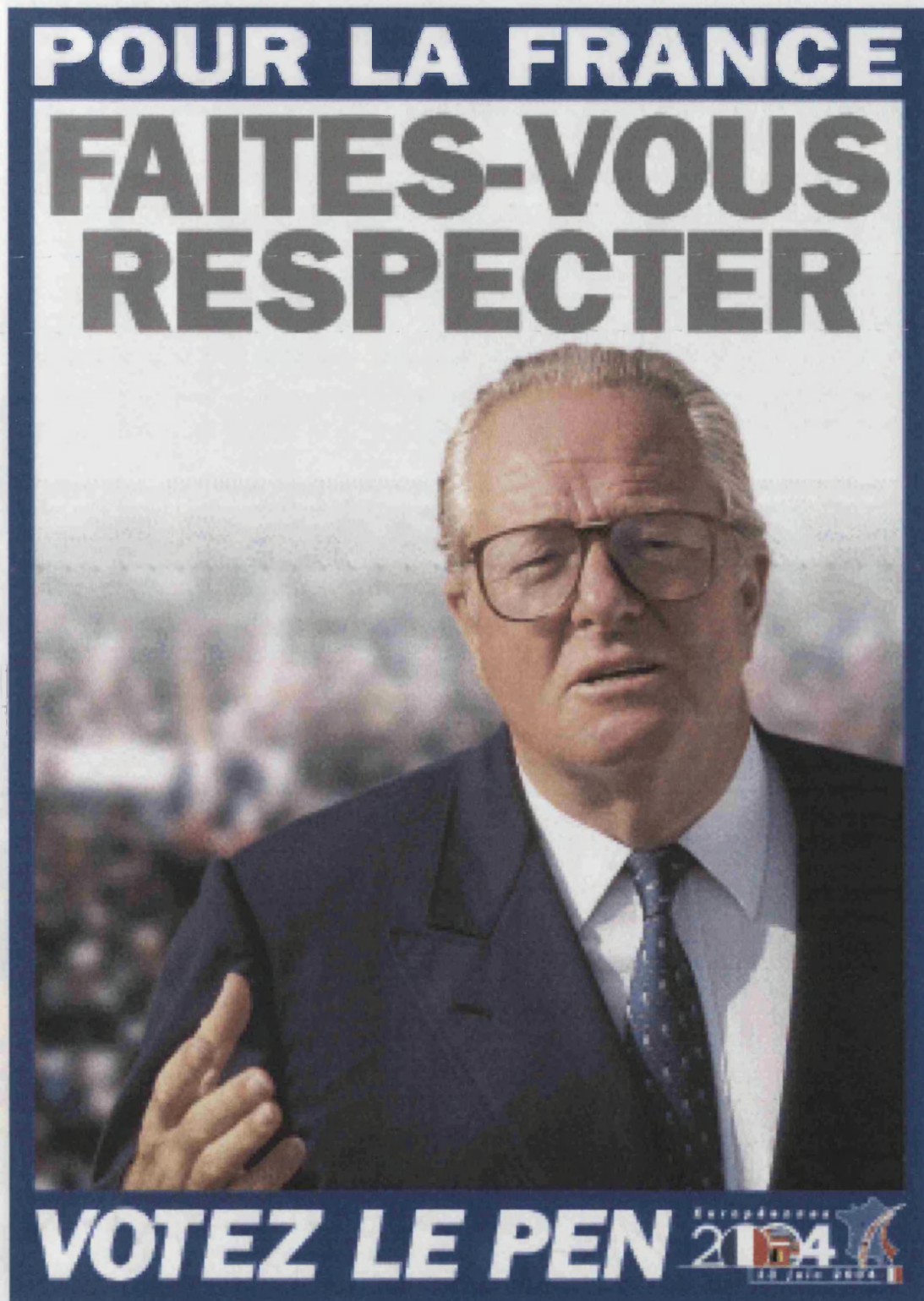


Figure 16



Figure 17

Figure 18

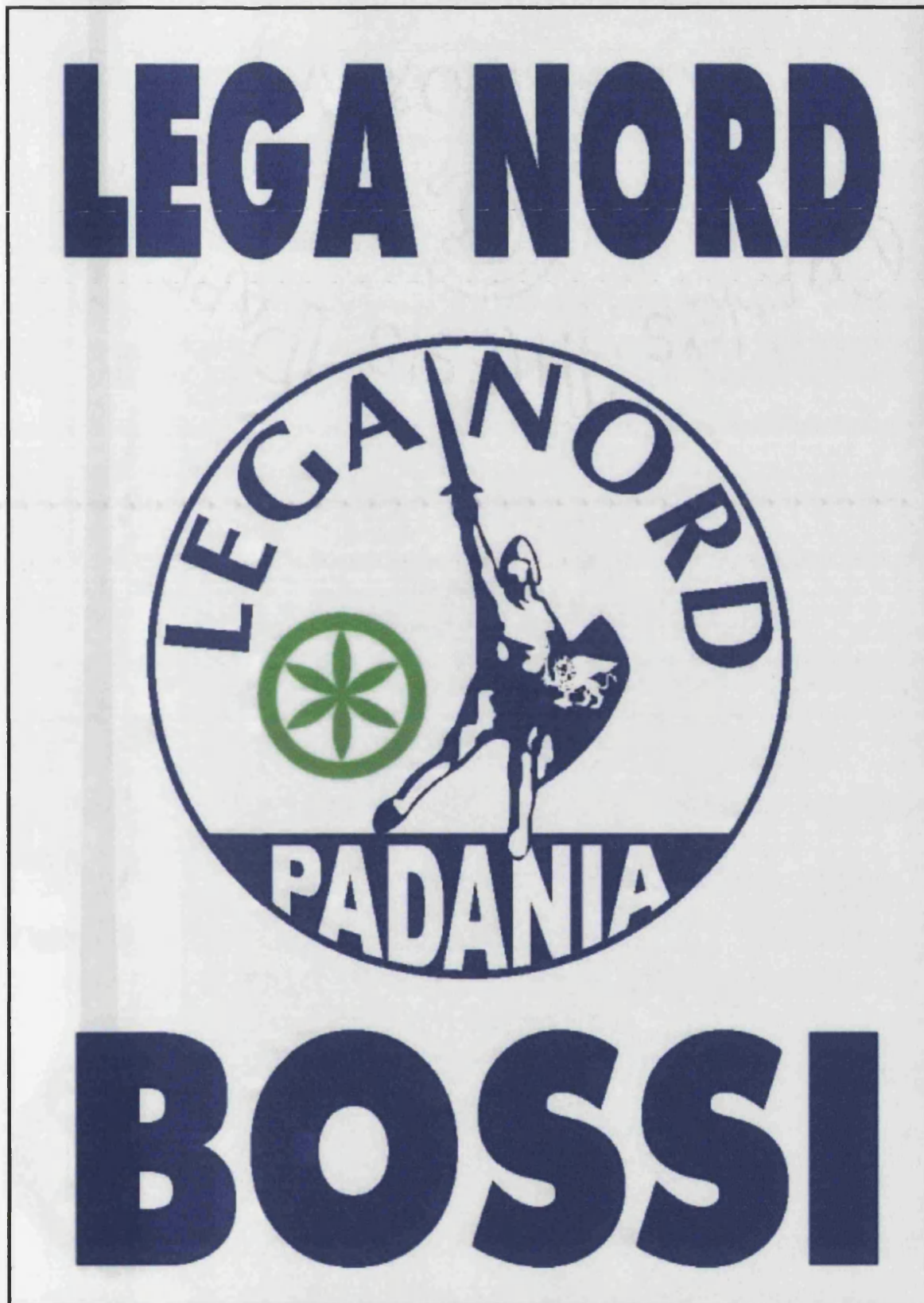


Figure 18

12 - 6 maggio 1996

Lega Nord



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23

Figure 24



Figure 24

Figure 25



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30

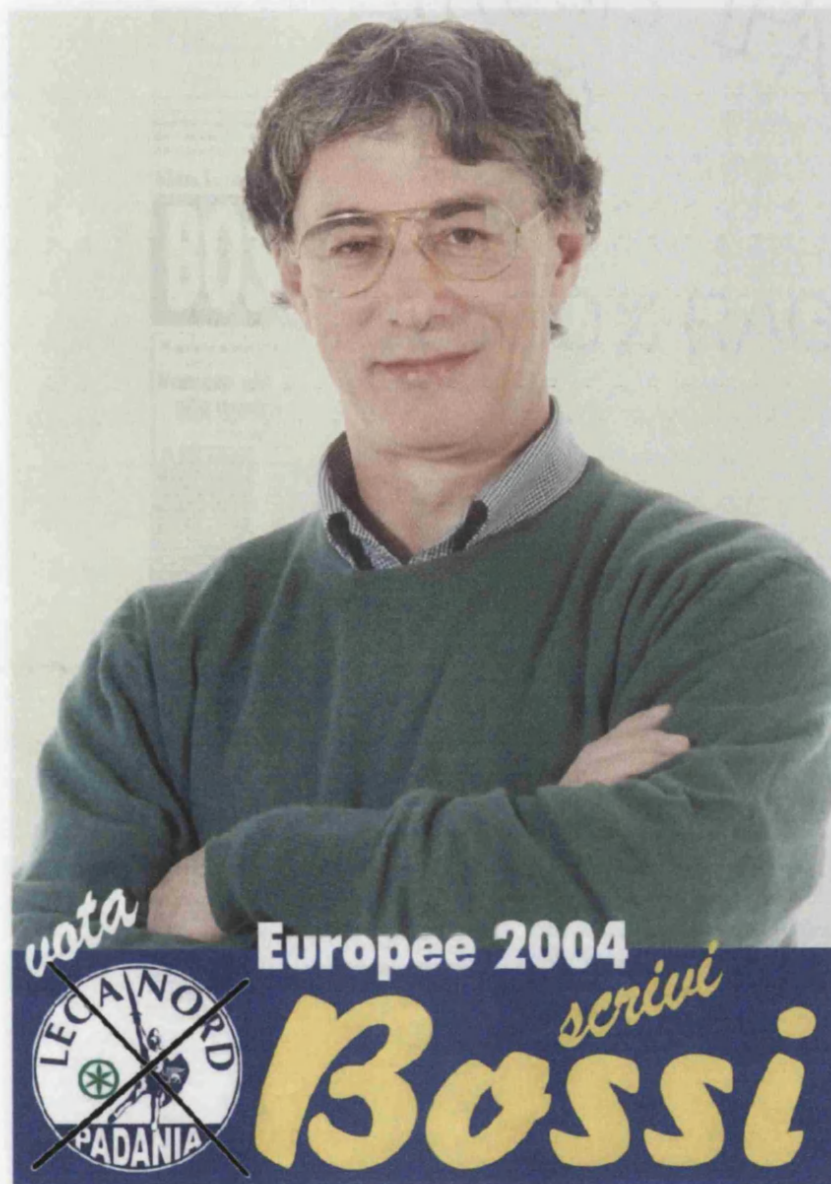


Figure 31

Figure 32

laPADANIA
LA VOCE DEL NORD
Settimanale 2 euro 2004

BOSSI, PONTIDA TI ASPETTA

Stile lo storico milanese. Il messaggio del leader alla nazione: voglio essere anch'io, è la mia festa

Il laico del direttore ai lettori
Sempre più ancorati alle nostre radici

LA LEGGE BOSSI SULL'AMMINISTRAZIONE PUBBLICA
benissimo: le esclusioni sono quadruplicate

Le parole del Segretario

VOCE ACQUEDOTTI DI ALENDA
VOCE VINCENZI DI ALENDA
02.3272448

Figure 32



Figure 33

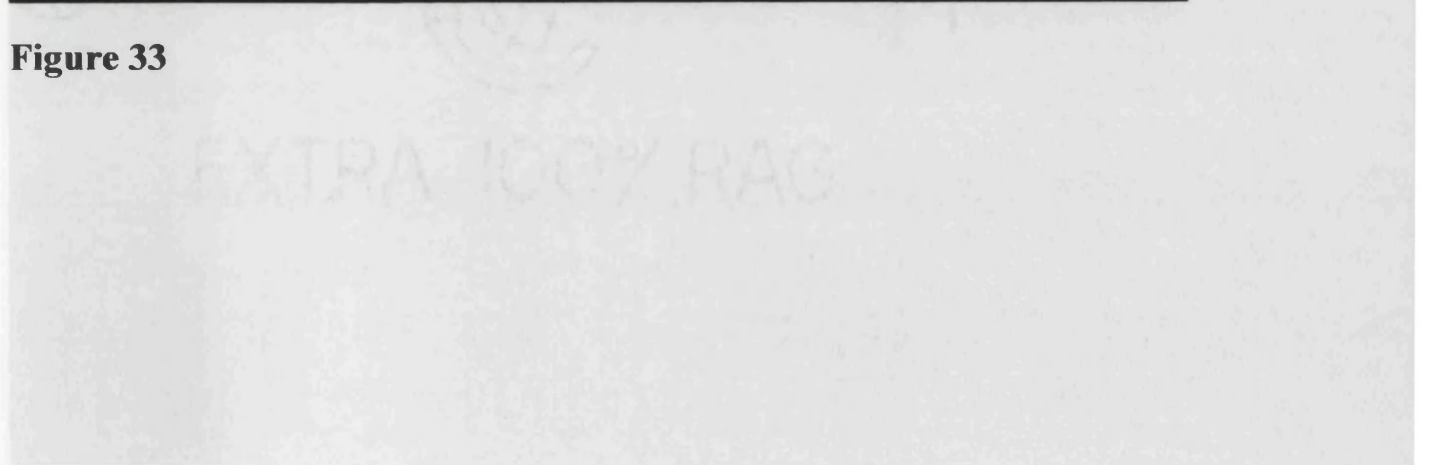


Figure 34

MISS ITALIA 2010



Figure 34

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Matteo Salvini, Director of Radio Padania Libera

Paolo Grimoldi, president of the MGP (Movimiento Giovanni Padani), Movement of Padania Youth.

Viviana, member of the Movement of Padania Youth.

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Il Federalismo

Famiglia Cristiana

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La Padania

La Repubblica

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